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The coming moment of truth with Iran

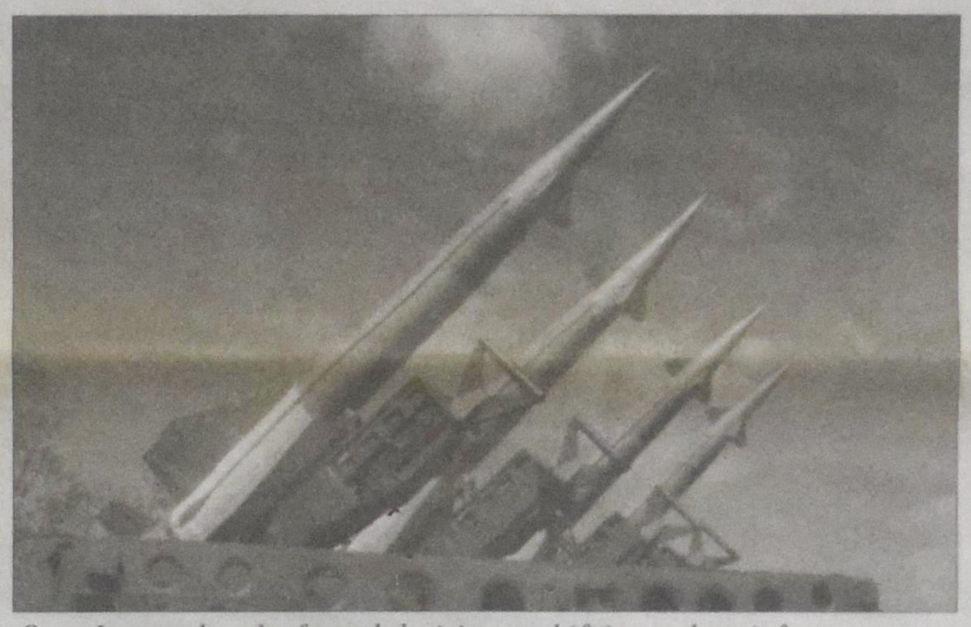
Jonathan de Vries

Concern over Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons has receded recently. Public consciousness and media coverage had been focused on the recent revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and the ongoing civil war in Syria. Nevertheless, the world is approaching a moment of truth as to whether it wishes to prevent Iran from going nuclear and how far it is prepared to go in order to do so.

Non-military efforts to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions have been unsuccessful. Diplomacy has been pointless as Iran's leadership has invested too much of its legitimacy in the pursuit of nuclear power status. While sanctions have produced economic hardships for Iran, there is no sign that they have been effective in convincing Iran's government or population to reconsider their nuclear program. While other aspiring nuclear regimes, such as North Korea, have used their nuclear programs as a means to extract modern day Danegeld from the international community in the form of foreign aid, Iran's program is solely an exercise in national self-aggrandizement. Iran wants the bomb and, absent any interference in its work towards it, it will likely be in a position to join the nuclear club in the very near future.

Estimates as to the time Iran still needs to produce a nuclear weapon vary. However, there is a general consensus that once Iran makes the formal decision to shift its current nuclear infrastructure into weapons production, it will likely take only three to six months for Iran to roll out its first operational nuclear weapon. This window of time will be the last chance for any pre-emptive action.

Advocates of pre-emptive military action advance a simple argument: allowing Iran to go nuclear is a worse scenario than any that may result from military attacks on Iran. An Iran armed with nuclear weapons would be disastrous for stability in the Middle East and for the security of the world's oil supply. A nuclear arsenal would allow Iran to establish itself as the regional power, extending Tehran's control over the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. Iran's well-known links with Islamic terrorist groups raises the spectre of nuclear terrorism. But perhaps the most fearsome consequence of Iran going nuclear would be the triggering of a new cold war between Iran and the only other nuclear power in the Middle East: Israel.



Once Iran makes the formal decision to shift its nuclear infrastructure into weapons production, it will likely take only three to six months to produce an operational nuclear weapon.

Israel's arsenal

Israel has never formally admitted the existence of its nuclear arsenal, but the fact that Israel possesses nuclear weapons has been one of the worst kept secrets in modern geopolitics. Iran's antipathy to the Jewish state is notorious, and while it may be a safe assumption that Iran would never attempt an overt nuclear attack on Israel,

See **Iran** *on page 2*

Nes Ammim: a sign of hope in the Holy Land

Dena Nicolai

If you drive a few hours northwest of Jerusalem, up into Galilee but a little off the typical tourist track, you might see a sign pointing down a small road to a place called "Nes Ammim." At the end of the road, you'll soon come upon a group of buildings spread across quiet green fields and gardens. If you've ever been on a *kibbutz* – a term describing an Israeli collective community, traditionally based on agriculture – you may think you've arrived at another. However this one is populated not by Israelis, but by European Christians.

Ness Ammim is a Christian community in Galilee that promotes dialogue between Arabs and Jews.

On the verge of celebrating its 50th anniversary, Nes Ammim has come a long way from its humble beginnings. Its story begins in 1960, 12 years after the founding of the modern state of Israel, when a small group of Dutch and Swiss Christians arrived in Galilee. Their intention in coming was to show solidarity with the Jewish people after the devastation of the Holocaust and the complicity/inaction of many European churches. The community's founders wanted to heal the rifts between Christians and Jews, and find a new way forward from centuries of anti-Semitism. They decided to call their community "Nes Ammim," a Hebrew term that comes from the book of Isaiah and means "sign to the nations," referring to God's promise of peace for all peoples.

Seeing opportunity in the collective community model of the Jewish kibbutzes, the Europeans purchased a plot of land and in 1963 received permission from the Israeli government to begin building. However, they faced opposition from the local Jewish community, who were understandably suspicious. There were massive protests, led by a local Rabbi who looked at this new "Christian community" as yet another form of proselytizing the Jews. After clear and respectful boundaries were established in regards to missionizing, building went ahead. Seven years after the founding of the community, the same Rabbi who had led the protests visited Nes Ammim and, after seeing the community's vision, became a steadfast friend. Today his daughter, also an Orthodox Jew, is still involved.

Changing role

Though Nes Ammim's original intention was encounter and soli-

See **Nes Ammim** *on page 2*

News

Iran *continued*

it would most likely employ whatever leverage its newly obtained nuclear status could bring against Israel and its allies. Tensions between the two countries remain high. Israel's military routinely clashes with Iranian backed militant groups and, as recently as 2007, has launched strikes against Iran's client state Syria. Also, unlike Washington and Moscow in the last century, Tehran and Jerusalem have no diplomatic relations or hotlines and share a much more condensed set of geographical circumstances.

The dangers associated with an Iranian-Israeli nuclear rivalry will only be heighted by recent developments in the wider Middle East. The initial optimism surrounding the Arab Spring – the hope that a region beset by authoritarian, irresponsible and oppressive governments would now embrace liberal democracy – has been extinguished in the face of political and demographic realities. Egypt is currently on course to elect an Islamist government, an event which likely spells the end of the country's peace treaty with Israel. For three decades that treaty has been one of the strongest guarantees against another Arab-Israeli war. The rise of another Islamist government, albeit a less-fundamentalist one, in Turkey is eroding another one of Israel's key relationships it the region.

The general picture that emerges is one of a Middle East with more governments sharing domestic policies that align with Iran's theocracy and which, while not necessarily sharing Tehran's foreign policy objectives, will likely be sympathetic or supportive of them. Israel, on the other hand, will find itself more isolated in the region, and faced with an adversary that routinely threatens to destroy it and which will soon have the means to follow through on that threat. Nations in dire straits often consider desperate measures. There are many who believe that, faced with an almost existential threat, Israel is almost certain to take military action against Iran regardless of the consequences. Operating on this assumption and given that the United States is better equipped and positioned to attack Iran, some see the best course of action as being for America to strike first to ensure the best possible result.

The actual effectiveness of military action to stop Iran's nuclear program is debatable. Most of the thinking surrounding a military strike on Iran is still inspired by the 1981 Osirak raid, the Israeli air strike on a French-supplied nuclear power plant outside Baghdad before it went online. Osirak was believed to be the key element of Saddam Hussein's nascent nuclear program and the plant's destruction was thought to have catastrophically undermined it. The belief is that the Osirak raid can be replicated, albeit on a larger scale, through precision air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Effective air strikes?

More recent analysis, however, has blunted the sensationalist view of the Osirak raid and raised questions as to how effective it really was in derailing the Iraqi nuclear program. The same sort of inquiry has been conducted on the question of how effective air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities could be. The conclusion is not encouraging. Even the most successful air strikes would likely set the Iranian nuclear program back only a year or two at most, and of course this assumes that any potential air strike would be successful. Unlike Iraq in 1981, Tehran has not bet the farm on a single nuclear power plant built out in the open. Rather, Iran's nuclear program is spread out over dozens of facilities, many of which are hardened against aerial bombing and are guarded by substantial air defences. This is not to say that air strikes could not succeed but that the scale of such strikes would be considerable, as would the potential for collateral damage and civilian casualties.

No matter how effective or ineffective air strikes would be, they would be certain to have immediate and severe repercussions both regionally and globally. Iran could retaliate conventionally against American bases and allies in the Persian Gulf, likely triggering a regional war; or it could also move to stop traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, causing the global price of oil to spike cataclysmically. Even if it did not want to retaliate directly, Iran could prompt Hezbollah to start another full scale war along Israel's border with Lebanon or re-start rocket attacks on Israeli cities. As the opponents of military action point out, all of this would be the price of delaying Iran's nuclear status for a relatively short time.

This leaves only the option of living with a nuclear Iran. While this option is unattractive, it is the most likely and, to be realistic, only politically viable one. Iran's nuclear ambitions, or the threat posed by a nuclear Iran, can only be eliminated through full scale regime change. This is, no doubt, an event to be wished for, but one that is unlikely to occur. Iran's theocratic government is firmly entrenched, and Iran was relatively immune to the effects of the Arab Spring. As to change through external force, only the United States is in a position to accomplish this, but the American public is unlikely to be supportive of another Middle Eastern war.

Jonathan de Vries studied political science at Calvin College. He lives and practices law in London, Ont.

Nes Ammim *continued*

darity rather than specific "dialogue," its identity has shifted both as the community became aware of new needs and as their agricultural role (primarily growing roses) was phased out with the influx of international products. As Pieter Dronkers, the incoming Dialogue Coordinator, explains, some of the donor churches in Europe – who also send volunteers for short term periods to work in the community – began to envision a new direction, seeing the growing necessity for Jewish-Arab dialogue and for greater solidarity with Arab Christians. As this new vision took hold, there were decisions to strengthen the volunteer program beyond just service into an opportunity for Europeans to learn more about the complexities of the situation in Israel-Palestine.

Today, the volunteers – mostly Dutch and German, many in their "gap year" between high school and university – help run Nes Ammim and its guest house (open to tourists and the general public as well as dialogue groups). However, they also benefit from study seminars in which they learn about the contemporary history of Israel. They talk to Holocaust survivors and visit the nearby Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz (whose original residents were former members of the underground in the Warsaw Ghetto), but they also learn about the situation in the West Bank and the daily realities for Palestinians living under Occupation. Additionally, their volunteer time involves "ideological working hours," where they teach English at a school for Arab children, visit the Jewish residents of a nearby seniors home, or volunteer for organizations working on conflict resolution and reconciliation. One of the goals of the Study Program is that when the volunteers return to Europe they will be ambassadors, sharing the many sides of life in the Holy Land but also the hope for the future.

Nes Ammim's role as a space for Jewish-Arab/Israeli-Palestinian dialogue is also primary. Those who help facilitate this dialogue do so with the clear belief that this is not their problem to solve, and they do not tell these groups how things should be done. Instead, they attempt to provide a space in which people can come together. As one young Arab participant told them, "there is no other place in Israel where all people – of any race or religion – can feel safe." Even major decisions about the direction of Nes Ammim are made in partnership with a group of Israelis, both Arabs and Jews, some of whom are also involved with teaching the volunteers.

Ness Ammim volunteers share a meal.

Current direction

Frans van der Sar, the outgoing Dialogue Coordinator, was also involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Holland. He emphasizes that the direction of Nes Ammim's vision is a response to the current situation in Israel-Palestine. "We can't ignore where Israel is today," he says. "Our identity is influenced by this reality."

With the political "peace process" at a standstill and questions and criticism continually swirling around Israel's Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, those at Nes Ammim are challenged to keep asking questions about their role. Dronkers explains the task: "How do you keep perspective? How and when do you take a stand? When is dialogue only in the interest of the 'powers that be'? When are words not enough?"

Even as they ask these questions, those at Nes Ammim still feel they are needed, particularly in Galilee, which is a mixed population of both Jewish and Arab Israelis. "They work together in daily life, but they don't necessarily form relationships," says van der Sar. "Nes Ammim helps with this. And there is the question of how you move past history, and past narratives that exclude. Nes Ammim helps with this also." As Dronkers adds, "First you must dialogue, then you can activate a new narrative," moving beyond words into action.

Yet, van der Sar is clear on Nes Ammim's limitations. "Galilee [where Palestinians have Israeli citizenship] is much different than the West Bank [where they do not]" he explains. "I don't believe in dialogue in the West Bank." Part of this is because – as Palestinians and others have noted – trying to dialogue over what's happening in the West Bank is like two people discussing how to divide a pizza while one person continues to eat it. In situations where there is an imbalance of power (political power for example), "dialogue" is often more in the interest of those on top.

However, Nes Ammim still welcomes and provides

See **Nes Ammim** *on page 3*

News

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

A scientist at a philosopher's conference

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

At the end of April I attended two conferences hosted on the University of Toronto campus: the ICS Social Justice and Human Rights conference and the Southern Ontario Neuroscience Conference (SONA). The ICS conference drew about 150 people, SONA's about 300. I enjoyed both conferences, and in both cases was struck by our need to communicate and the importance of the word for academics.

Conferences are all about communication, talking to each other, listening and giving talks to a group of attendees. The opportunity to hear, ask questions and get more detailed answers is at the heart of communication at conferences. Although written text has its strengths, it does not have the same immediacy and life as the spoken word. The word (both written and spoken) is central to what we do and who we are.

The two conferences were quite different and highlighted for me some differences between the talking I do as a neuroscientist and what appears to happen in philosophy.

At the SONA conference we had speakers and students presenting posters (a five-by-three foot printed sheet with text and graphs mounted on a board or wall) about their specific research. In most cases the focus was on a specific project and how it expanded or clarified previous work; each poster presented another small brick in the wall of science. Even the keynote speakers focused on their specific projects combining several experiments to add a small incremental increase to our understanding of the creation. I felt at home and engaged several of the student presenters in discussions of how their worked linked up to other studies in the scientific literature or some of the work we were doing. Each project was intimately linked to other work in the area.

At the ICS conference the tone seemed to be different. This perception may have arisen from my limited knowledge of the specifics of the conference, but I was able to follow most of the talks. The speakers seemed to be focusing more on principles, larger issues, and not on specifics. It appeared to me that each person was building his or her argument from the ground up, sometimes in agreement with others, more often in opposition to another philosopher or thinker.

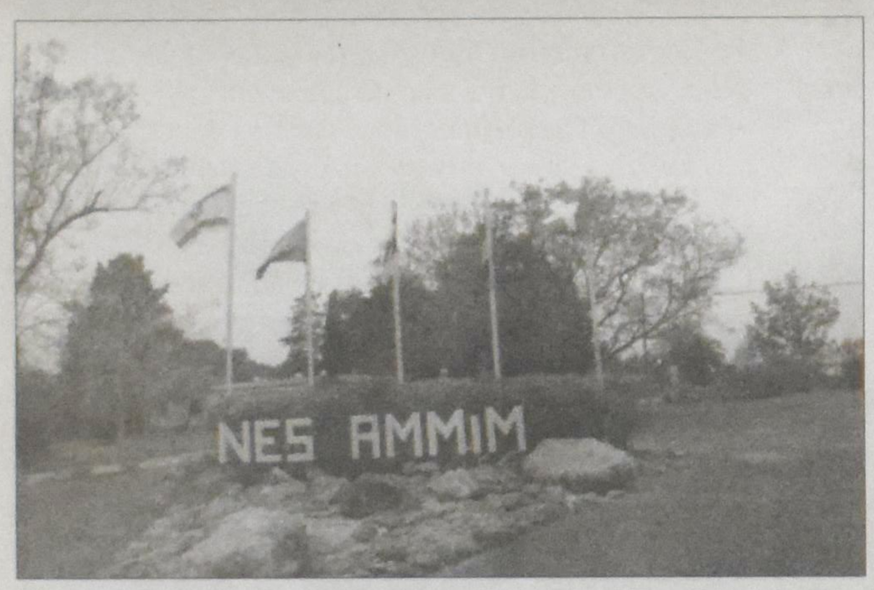
The ICS conference was wonderful in the breadth of the attendees: Christians, speakers from other religious traditions, atheists, people who worked in academia and those who worked in the field (practitioners), students and ministers. This diversity of attendees meant that there was a richness of viewpoints that ranged from the practical to the very theoretical. It tended to keep all the speakers honest as the audience would quickly be aware if an argument ran into problems. Communication was broad going across many borders and trying to bring very different people together and promote understanding.

However, I felt that the discussion was not incremental as it was at the scientific conference. The talks and topics were important and the speakers all were excellent in their ability to provide insight on Human Rights and Social Justice, but it appeared to me that we were always working on foundations; I detected little evidence of the development that would result in the incremental progress that seems to be a hallmark of science. There are times in science when big changes happen (Einstein's development of Newton's physics being a prime example) but this leads to a widespread acceptance within a generation and then we progress incrementally again. I find it hard to determine what the essential nature of this difference is but it may be tied up in who we are as part of God's creation. We may have the freedom to choose our "worldview" but not our world.

While it is clear that science (in my case neuroscience) and philosophy are different with differing methods of developing and communicating I wondered if these differences have a parallel in our faith life. Is our understanding of the Word growing incrementally in our Christian walk or are we continually building foundations and frameworks? Alternatively are there aspects of our faith life that are more like science and others that are more like philosophy?

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University, and certainly not a philosopher.

Nes Ammim *continued*



Nes Ammim guest house

space for all sides, whether organizations like Musalaha (which brings Jewish Christians and Arab Christians together), Bethlehem Bible College (a theological school for Palestinian Christians), or Creativity for Peace (which trains young female leaders, both Palestinian and Jewish).

Other roles

"We also see a role for us in bringing Arab and Western Christians together," van der Sar explains. "Local [Arab] Christians are suffering from the denial of the Western Churches, or the feeling they get from those churches that they shouldn't be there," he adds, referring to the notion – advanced by Christian Zionists in particular – that Arabs have no place in "the Holy Land." He is emphatic that Western Christians must be challenged to engage critically with this issue. "Sometimes people need to be kicked out of their certainty. We have to listen to the voice of God in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. I'm not going to be blackmailed into a one-sided choice on this." Van der Sar has no hesitation about the role the Europeans at Nes Ammim should play: "We are not here to be part of the conflict, we are here to help people deal with the conflict." Dronkers puts it another way, "We are working for restorative justice – for human dignity."

Despite continuing struggles, the ongoing failure of any political peace process, and questions about Nes Ammim's future, van der Sar's work has given him hope: "Change can always happen," he says. "Look at South Africa. Look at Northern Ireland. People said things would never change, but they are, even if slowly. Beneath all of the bitterness, anger and fear, something else comes out: we can reach reconciliation and reparation. We can discover the real things that people are capable of, even in extreme situations." The work done and the conversations had at Nes Ammim are some of the first building blocks towards understanding in a land torn by division. "[The opportunity to sit down with 'the other'] can restore people's humanity," says van der Sar. "You are each other's cure. Only 'the other' can take away the anger and the fear."

Dena Nicolai is a student in the Master of Christian Studies Program at Regent College in Vancouver. She has travelled to Israel-Palestine several times and is currently spending a month there funded through Regent College by the "Conway Holy Land Travel Bursary," researching organizations and people involved in peace-building and reconciliation.

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Editorials

The zero-mile diet

Angela Reitsma Bick

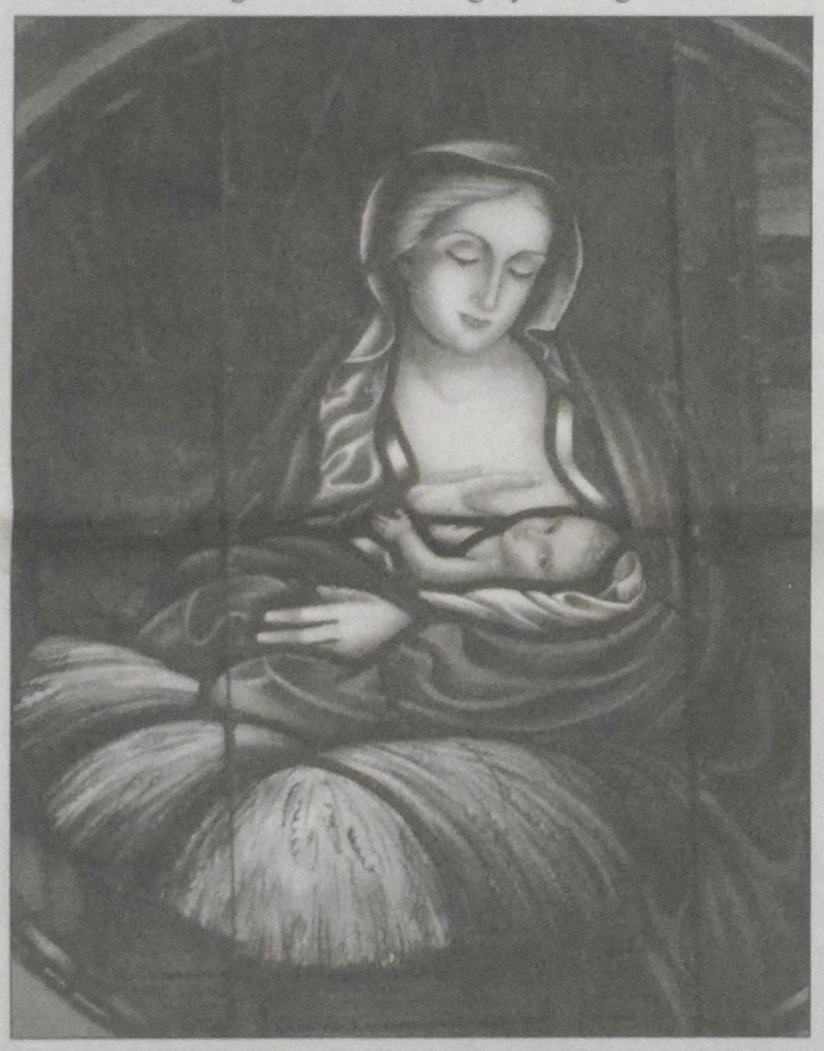
A living room. A handful of women. A hungry baby in my arms. I begin to nurse.

"Would you like a blanket?" the hostess asks.

She's not really wondering whether I need one; she's telling me to cover up.

I decline. A tiny part of me likes to stir up this kind of trouble. I'm on maternity leave, after all, and there aren't that many causes I can rally to (from a sitting position). I think women should be free to feed their babies anywhere. It sounds so obvious that I can't believe the issue keeps coming up, even in the news. We're okay with a chain of *restaurants* dedicated to breasts but not a glimpse of one feeding a baby? Ridiculous.

Last October, Barrie's *La Leche League* hosted a "nurse-in" on the steps of city hall. All breastfeeding mothers were invited to help promote lactation by nursing in public. I went, but nursing a newborn on a gray folding chair didn't feel revolutionary. It just felt normal. Still, they had, in a nod to the adjacent Farmer's Market, excellent t-shirt slogans: "Breast milk – local and sustainable." It's the original zero-mile diet! Lowest carbon footprint *ever*.



There are dozens of works of art that depict Mary nursing the baby Jesus.

"The act of breastfeeding is a picture of the care God gives us." – Rachel Stone

Public opinion on breastfeeding has vacillated throughout history. In the Middle Ages, it was only done by poor people. Royalty avoided the hassle. Mothers who couldn't or didn't want to breastfeed hired a wet nurse, or used tapered cups and cow's milk. In 1860, Nestle invented infant formula; a century later, the baby boomers made it popular.

'Not in my church'

In February, a woman in Georgia says her pastor asked her to stop breastfeeding in church, describing it as "lewd." If you're interested in iconography, however, there are dozens of statues and paintings of Mary nursing baby (and toddler) Jesus. These were once displayed in churches around the world, disappearing, perhaps, as bottle-feeding became more prevalent. Some are so revealing that – if Mary had a Facebook page – she wouldn't be allowed to post them online. The social networking giant has capriciously removed breastfeeding photos and even shut down users' accounts to protect viewers from images they call "pornographic and obscene."

"If breastfeeding disturbs you," one angry woman retorted, "please feel free to put a blanket over your *own* head."

Calgary just opened the second human milk bank in Canada a few weeks ago. It's a non-profit that gives premature babies donated breast milk, which can be a lifesaving source of nourishment. The Mothers' Milk Bank screens donors and pasteurizes their milk to kill bacteria. A country as big as Canada could use far more than two of these organizations. Brazil, by comparison, has 190. Canadian milk banks were more common until HIV/AIDS scares in the 1980s forced their closures. If you have watched a fragile, two-pound preemie grab hold of life on a diet of breast milk, you know the nutritional punch it packs. So far, breast milk is only available by prescription because supply is so limited.

Got milk?

A river. A handful of women. A hungry baby in a basket. The princess begins to worry.

"Would you like me to find you a Hebrew nurse?" Miriam boldly asks.

She's not really wondering whether the princess wants him fed; she's telling her to save him.

"Go," says Pharoah's daughter.

So the girl went.

"Mother – he is alive! He needs your milk!"

And it's hard to imagine a more joyous or unexpected reunion than that one.

"Scripture speaks of God's wilderness provisions as God 'suckling' Israel," Rachel Stone writes in *Christianity Today*'s **her.meneutics** blog. "Breastfeeding is a beautiful picture of God's care: as babies crave not just nutrition but warmth and closeness, so we depend on God not simply for our daily bread alone but for the ongoing comfort and presence of the Holy Spirit" (*Breastfeeding in Church, and other petty crimes).*

Our family has a child in heaven; his sisters mention it often. And that loss heightens our joy now. The baby I'm nursing is *here.* He's alive! He needs milk – breast or bottle or milk bank, it doesn't matter. It's a joy and a privilege to have the choice. And if, after all this, that still bothers you, I probably have a spare blanket.

Angela Reitsma Bick lives in Barrie with her husband and three children under seven. She will return to CC as Editor in September.

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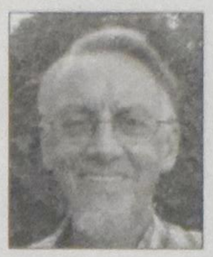
Not all bullying is equal in Ontario

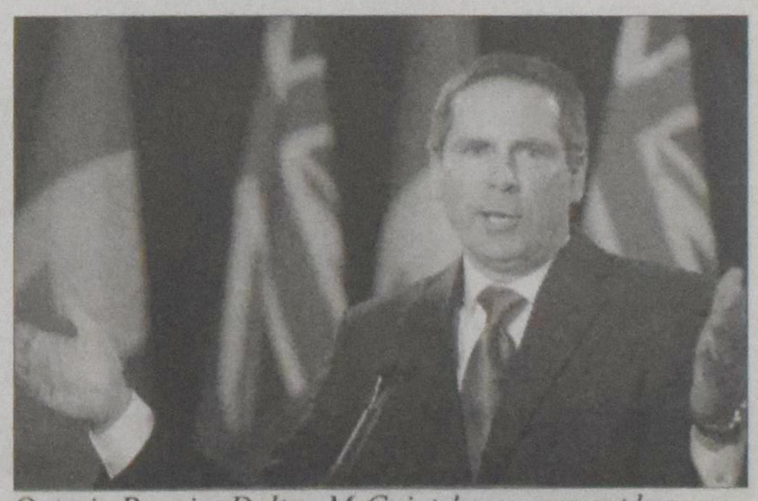


Bert Witvoet

Bullying is a nasty reality in all of the nation's schools. Bullying is done for all kinds of reasons. In 2006 the Toronto District School Board conducted a study to determine causes of bullying. Body image ranked highest from grades 7 to 12 (at least 30 percent), followed by academic standing and language. The next three categories (below six percent) were gender, religion and income. Gay bullying did not receive a rating in this study. In any case, it is apparent that bullying as such is a matter of intolerance toward differences, especially among groups of immature people, and that can include adults.

Few people disagree that bullying in schools is harmful and needs to be addressed. The Ontario government wants to do something about bullying in both public and separate schools. But it has passed a rather unexpected law that seems aimed at discrediting the approach taken in Catholic schools against bullying. The Liberal government under Premier Dalton McGuinty has passed a bill which forces all publicly supported schools to allow its students to organize and name a gay-straight alliance in their schools. Cardinal Thomas Collins calls this action an unacceptable micromanagement of Catholic school policies and a violation of the principle of freedom of religion.

The Premier, a Catholic himself, whose kids have attended Catholic schools, argues that he has a responsibility to all citizens in the province, regardless of their religious status, and that he is merely trying to make all schools safe against bullies. The cardinal says that Catholic schools also seek the safety of their students in the face of bullying, including the safety of gay students. But they do not want to single out any one form of bullying. The premier is not satisfied with that. His anti-bullying stance is more than what it purports to be. It's not just about bullying. He and many others want to normalize homosexual behaviour. And that is what the Catholic Church and its schools do not want to do.



Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty's government has passed a bill which forces all publicly supported schools to allow its students to organize and name a gay-straight alliance in their schools.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says homosexual behaviour is "intrinsically disordered" and "under no circumstance can it be approved." And there's the rub as far as a great number of Canadians is concerned. To call homosexual behaviour disordered is considered almost a hate crime. Homosexuality has been around for thousands of years. But what is different today is that homosexuality has moved into the mainstream of society. To say that marriage, for example, should be restricted to the union between a man and a woman is frowned upon as an outdated view. Gay marriages are legal all over

See **Not all bullying is equal in Ontario** *on page 5*

Letters

Polarizing politics

A common critique of the present U.S. political situation is its bitter polarization. Canadian political polarization is also intense. Among the reasons for this polarization is the increasing tendency for many of us to "consume" only media that reinforces the pole where we already reside. When we do encounter opposite or even other ideas and commitments we disdain them.

Chandra Pasma's "Budget cuts target the most vulnerable" (*CC* May 28) is an instructive example of that polarization. For anyone who has read her previous articles, *CC* didn't have to publish this one. It was unerringly predictable. Those who are not so familiar with her previous writing only needed the title and perhaps the picture caption to know what the article would say.

If this were a letter to Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, it would, of course, never reach him. The junior letter-opening staff member who got it would read the title, scan a bit of the rest and check it off on her feedback sheet under the category "Left wing lite. Ignore. Won't vote for us no matter what we do."

Why will Pasma's article be ignored? In large part because of what she will NOT consider:

1) Encouragement of individual responsibility in place of entitlement. So it will not recognize that the billions we spend on health care have extended life and reasonable working life so that we don't need and can't afford such early old age security (OAS).
2) The long advance notice given for the OAS changes and the fact that the encouragement of tax-advantaged savings plans can help responsible people plan for their own retirement.
3) The dangers of deficits and the already excessive cost of debt, as well as the possible disastrous effects higher interest rates will have on our budget. In other words, Pasma doesn't ask how far along we are on the Greek road. She does not address the injustice of dumping our irresponsible debt on our children.
4) That there is anything good in the budget, or that there might be other worthwhile perspectives that should be seriously engaged with.

Now even though I hear Pasma's articles as a polarizing shallow one-groove record, I don't want to imply that *CC* shouldn't publish them. One role of journalism is to recognize different voices. You do. As an example, you publish articles equally polarizing, but from a different perspective, by Harry Antonides, though arguably he has more and deeper grooves. One could evaluate his articles in about the same way as I have Pasma's.

But being an equal opportunity publisher for both poles does little to reduce the polarization. We just shout past each other with ever rising volume and ever more selective hearing.

In that context the politically correct prescription for dialog will likely not be a productive first step. So how about this as one possible early step: keep publishing polarizing articles for a while. But find deeply insightful Christian experts who can provide moderating evaluation of the deep convictions of both sides and tame our appetite for polarization. Even though the poles may never join, such evaluation will help those of us uncomfortable with adversarial shouting. Could they even make the conversation more civil and open ears on both sides?

Syl Gerritsma
St. Catharines, Ont.

Chandra Pasma responds:

I would agree with Syl Gerritsma that political polarization is a problem and that listening only to voices that you agree with is a dangerous habit. Yet I'm afraid that Gerritsma finds me polarizing simply because I have a point of view and he disagrees with it. That is precisely the kind of attitude that leads to political polarization!

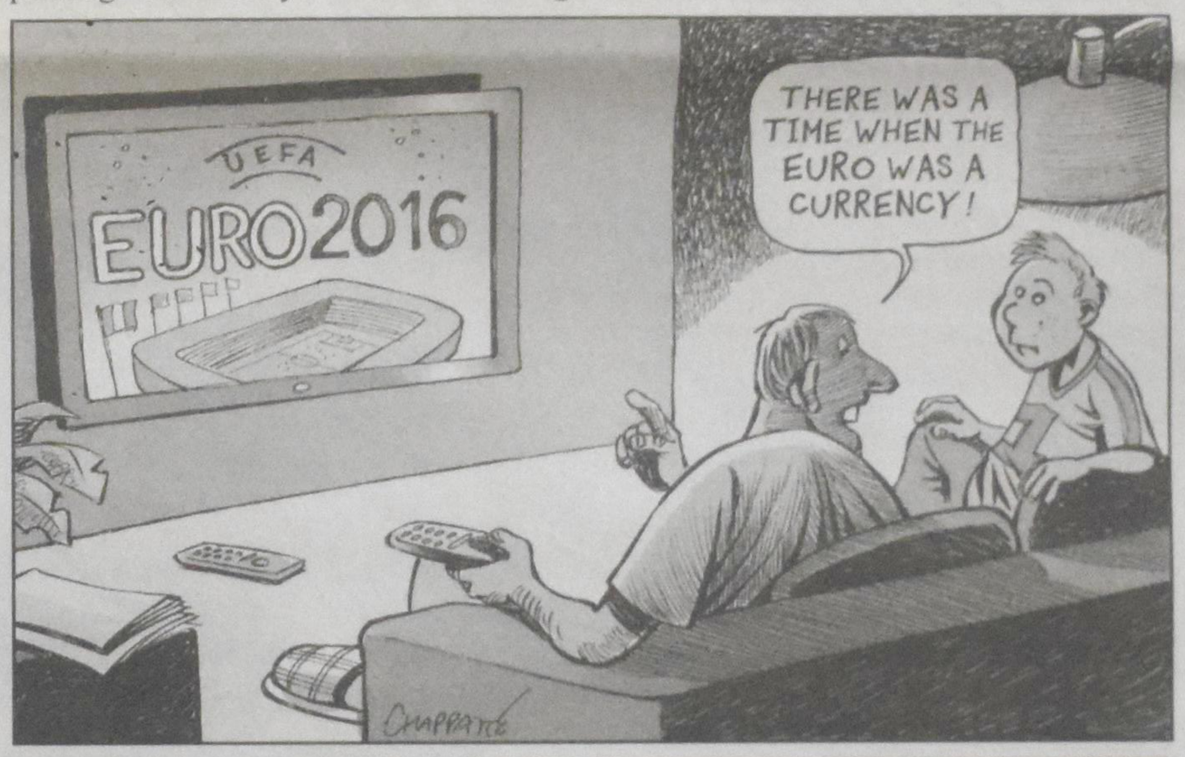
However, I'm glad that Gerritsma called for the *Christian Courier* to keep printing articles that he disagrees with, since that is the kind of engagement required to overcome polarization – allowing space for voices that differ from our own.

With regard to Gerritsma's specific concerns with my article, I am not sure what individual responsibility has to do with Old Age Security. In the post-war years, as my grandparents' generation constructed the social safety net, there was a widely held recognition that we were all part of a shared society in which the well-being of every person was intimately connected. Citizens pooled their resources so that everyone was better off, so that no person needed to live in poverty in the midst of abundant wealth (a very Christian idea, I might add!).

Now the government is telling Canadians that some seniors should live in poverty – seniors who have struggled with health issues, disabilities, early retirements forced by injury, illness or overwork, seniors who have fallen between the cracks of our social safety net and have only been caught by the very bottom rung of poverty-level social assistance.

What's more, the government is implementing the change in a way that hurts poor seniors the most – they will lose up to $16,000 of income while the richest Canadian seniors will lose only $6,000 a year. And the government has ensured that the change will take effect only after the cost of OAS has peaked and is beginning to decline. In other words, it is a poorly planned cost-saving measure.

Finally, the government is insisting that OAS is unaffordable against the advice of its own Department's commissioned research, successive Chief Actuaries of Old Age Security, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Indeed, Canada's Gross National Product per capita, the most commonly used indicator of financial capacity, has never been higher. Canada can eminently afford to take care of its citizens without going down the Greek road. But it comes down to a choice, and this government chooses to privilege the wealthy over the well-being of all its citizens.



Not all bullying is equal in Ontario *continued*

Canada. What is also different today compared to only a few decades ago is that homosexuality is politicized as a result of some powerful pro-gay lobby groups.

In a way, the chickens are coming home to roost. For centuries, civilizations have been terribly intolerant of homosexuals, and the Christian church, for one, is only recently coming to terms with negative attitudes toward those who, often against their will, discover that their sexual orientation is same-sex rather than heterosexual. But now that many Christians agree that they must love their homosexual neighbour as themselves, the pendulum has swung to the other side, and Christians are expected to love the homosexual orientation as well as its practice.

No doubt, the Ontario government would disapprove of the Christian Reformed Church's report on homosexuality. The CRC position as stated in its 1973 report says: *"Homosexuality is a condition of disordered sexuality that reflects the brokenness of our sinful world. Persons of same-sex attraction should not be denied community acceptance solely because of their sexual orientation and should be wholeheartedly received by the church and given loving support and encouragement. Christian homosexuals, like all Christians, are called to discipleship, holy obedience, and the use of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. Opportunities to serve within the offices and the life of the congregation should be afforded to them as to heterosexual Christians. Homosexualism (that is, explicit homosexual practice), however, is incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture."*

So far governments have not spoken out against churches and their teachings. That is partly because of the still-maintained idea of the separation of church and state. How long that will last is anybody's guess.

Bert Witvoet is a contributing editor who lives in St. Catharines, Ont. He was a delegate at the CRC Synod of 2011 and was disappointed that this synod did not want to appoint a study committee to have a fresh look at the 1973 report on homosexuality.

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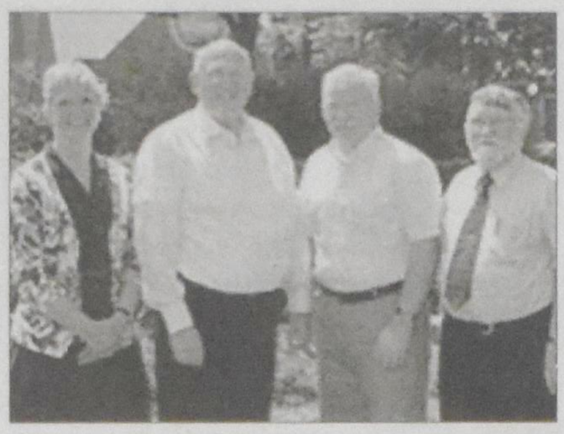
News

CRC synod meets in Ontario

Marian Van Til, *with files from CRCNA*

ANCASTER, Ont. – At *CC* press time, the Christian Reformed Church in North America was holding its week-long, annual general synod in Ancaster, Ont., at Redeemer University College. The synod most often meets at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Synod 2012 opened with what was described as "rousing" worship at the host church, Ancaster CRC – led by the church's pastor, Jeff Klingenberg. Bringing greetings to delegates were Chief Bryan LaForme from the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation and Dr. Hubert Krysgman, president of Redeemer.

In its first order of business, synod elected its officers. Elected president was Rev. Leslie Kuiper, a retired pastor in Oostberg, Wisconsin. Synod 2012 was Kuiper's eighth synod.

Rev. Bruce Persenaire, pastor of the CRC in Escalon, Calif., was elected vice-president of Synod 2012. This was his 11th synod.

Rev. Thea Leunk, pastor of the Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, was elected first clerk. This was her third synod and second time as a synod officer. (In 2008 she was vice-president.)

Martin Bosveld, an elder delegate from Chatham, Ont., was elected second clerk. This was his fifth synod.

Kuiper addressed the delegates briefly, reminding them, "We come with a variety of spiritual gifts and insights, but all as members of the church of Jesus Christ. I look forward to serving Jesus Christ with you in this coming week. I trust his Spirit will be obvious in our decisions and the manner in which we reach them."

A summary of synod's decisions will appear in *CC* July 9.

State of the CRC is 'critical,' says church leader

ANCASTER, Ontario (CRCNA) – In his annual address to synod, the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church asserted, "The condition [of the church] is critical."

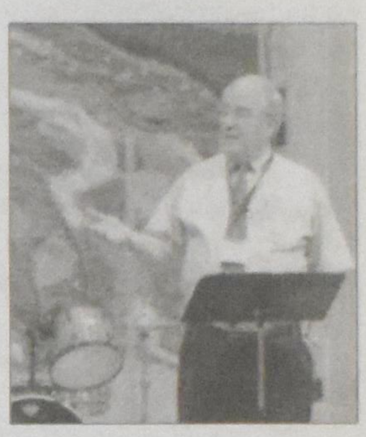
Rev. Joel Boot was addressing a combined meeting of synod delegates and delegates to the first-ever young adult leadership summit "re:kindle 2012."

"There are new people, new things happening, new organizations taking shape and the ground is shaking beneath our feet," said Boot. He noted many changes in leadership at the CRC's ministry agencies and educational institutions in recent years. He also pointed out changes in the CRC's ecumenical relationships, especially the closer relationship between the CRC and the Reformed Church in America.

Alluding to Charles Dickens, Boot said that this could be the worst of times or the best of times for the CRC. He noted a slow but steady decline in membership, yet suggested that this era could be among the best of times. "Just maybe," he said, "the ground shaking beneath our feet is the dramatic movement of the Spirit of God. And what we do about it makes all the difference in the world."

Boot said that the creation stewardship Synod 2012 would deal with is the product of a church that believes "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it." And a report from the "Faith Formation" committee reflects a church seeking to be obedient to God's expectation that we "train up our children in the way they should go."

Boot went on to say, "Thirty-five plus overtures about the Belhar [Confession] is not about a church at odds with itself but a glimpse of a church that takes confession of faith very seriously."



He closed by saying that the church's condition is critical because the time is critical. "What we let God do to us and through us … is critical."

Following Boot's address, Rev. Mark Hilbelink, a member of the leadership team that organized the re:kindle 2012 young adult summit, spoke about characteristics of the "millennial generation" and why it is a challenge for the church to stay connected with them – and they with the church. Afterwards, re:kindle 2012 members and synod delegates met in small groups to discuss a series of questions raised in the two addresses.

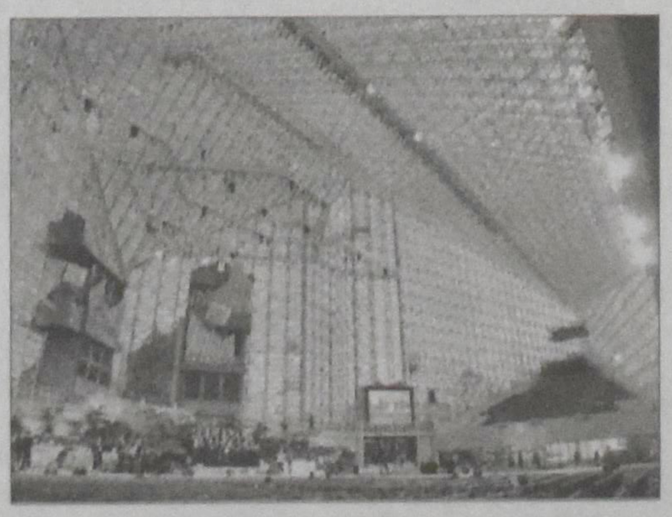
Follow-up:

Crystal Cathedral now Christ Cathedral, and Catholic

Marian Van Til

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. – Christ Cathedral is the new name of Robert Schuller's former Crystal Cathedral, the iconic Protestant landmark that was bought last November by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange County, Calif., for USD $57.7 million.

The name, unique among Catholic churches, was chosen by Bishop Tod D. Brown from more than 4,000 names suggested by the 1.3 million Catholic parishioners of Orange County. The name required the approval of the Vatican, which was easily granted.



As *CC* previously reported, the Orange County diocese originally considered building a new cathedral "from the ground up," said Fr. Christopher Smith, who will represent Bishop Brown at Christ Cathedral. But when the Crystal Cathedral became available due to bankruptcy and Rev. Robert Schuller's resignation in 2010, the Catholic diocese pursued buying the eye-catching building. The glass-walled church with its massive pipe organ seats 2,700 people and sits on a 31-acre site. As a Catholic church it will be the second-largest in the U.S., after Los Angeles's 10-year-old, 4,500-seat Our Lady of the Angels, home to five million Catholics.

Remnants of the Crystal Cathedral congregation still worship there and will relocate. Fr. Smith will begin his work at Christ Cathedral on July 2, but no reopening date has yet been set for the cathedral.

India: Protestant pastor found brutally murdered

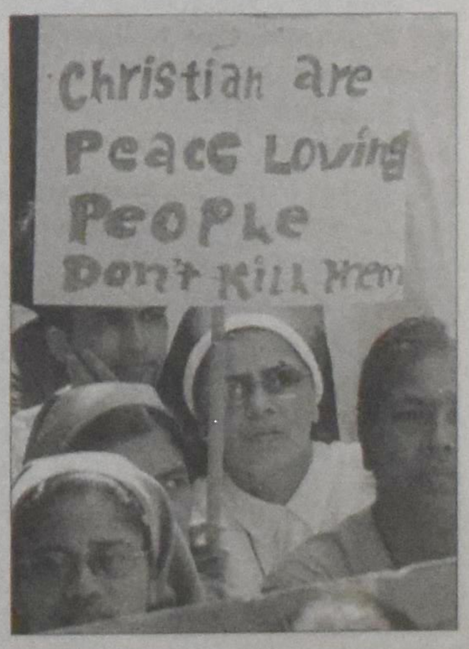
Marian Van Til, *with files from Agenzia Fides and CCO*

CHENNAI, India (Agenzia Fides) – A Protestant pastor has been brutally murdered in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The body of Rev. C. Wilson, 54, was found on June 2 near a highway. According to police, his skull had been fractured with stones. The pastor led a Christian community in the city of Chennai and was traveling home from Kanyakumari where he had gone to preach. Wilson may have been stopped and killed a short distance from the road, said investigators. Around the body there were pamphlets and newspapers of Christian content.

The police have so far not given a reason for the killing but are not ruling out either robbery or "religious hatred." The latter looks more likely, since "very often in cases of robbery victims are not killed so brutally."

Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians, believes the evidence shows Wilson was murdered because he was a Christian pastor. Following the killing George said, "Religious Hindu fundamentalism has been gaining ground in Tamil Nadu. Since the beginning of 2012 at least five serious incidents of attacks against Christians have occurred in the state. We demand the intervention of state authorities to protect the rights and lives of Indian citizens who believe in Christ."



News

Bangladeshi author decries female 'gendercide' in the East

WASHINGTON D.C. (CNA/EWTN News) – A new novel by a businesswoman and author from Bangladesh is highlighting the ongoing tragedy of female "gendercide" in many Eastern cultures.

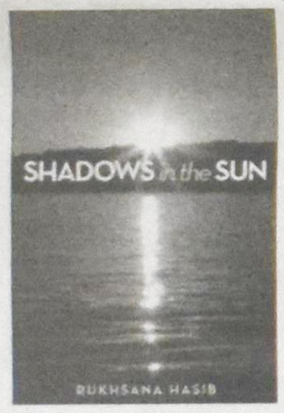
Female infanticide and sex-selection abortion constitute "discrimination against women in its cruelest form," says Rukhsana Hasib. In her latest book, *Shadows in the Sun*, Hasib deals with the serious problem of the preference for male babies which is prominent in many parts of the world.

A Bangladeshi immigrant to the U.S. who works to promote human rights for women in the East, Hasib said she was shocked when she realized that female infanticide and sex-selection abortion are still happening regularly in Eastern cultures. And the girls being killed are not just from poor and uneducated families, she noted, but they also come from people who have schooling and economic means.

Reports estimate that about 50,000 girls are aborted in India each month, and approximately one million girls in the country "disappear" every year. The problem is also serious in China, where parents are allowed only one child and a majority want that child to be a boy.

Women against themselves

Driven to take a stand, Hasib decided to write a novel based on the "truth of female infanticide." She hopes to help readers realize that "such atrocities against women – who are the nucleus of the family – still exist" and that women are "willing participants" in acts of violence against their own gender.



Shadows in the Sun tells the fictitious story of "one poor mother's stand" to give her daughter a chance at a better life, Hasib explains. The book begins in Bangladesh and then ties into India and the United States, highlighting the universal nature of the "gendercide" problem.

Hasib observes that sex-selection abortion is actually illegal in India. But the laws are often not enforced and are easily circumvented through bribery. The fundamental problem is the cultural fact that girls are not valued, Hasib says. "The birth of a son is celebrated." Boys will help provide a living and carry on the family's future. But the birth of a daughter is "considered a burden." The family must protect her virtue, find a husband for her and provide a dowry. Hasib hopes that her book will help draw greater attention to the horror of gendercide in all of its manifestations throughout the world. "We have to be aware of this," she insisted.

Ironically, gender-selecting abortion became news last month in the U.S. when it was discovered via undercover videos that some Planned Parenthood clinics were agreeing to abort girl babies because they were female. While the practice is repugnant to most North Americans, it hasn't been much discussed publicly and only some states have outlawed such abortions. In response, the U.S. House of Representatives drew up the Prenatal Non-discrimination Act that would have prohibited such abortions. Because of an unusual procedure used to get the vote to the floor, a two-thirds majority was needed. The bill was defeated in 246-168. Pro-choice Democrats said they opposed the bill for fear it would lead to other restrictions on abortion.

Dordt musicians perform classical music in historic places

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC/CRCNA) – The 32-person Dordt College Chamber Orchestra had nothing but good to say about their recent two-week musical tour through Europe, where they visited historical places and religious sites, connected with host families and were able to share their faith through their music.

Under the direction of Bradley Miedema, the orchestra performed in France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Sarah De Smith is a violinist, a third-year student and an education major from Sioux Center, Iowa. De Smith said orchestra members were grateful to be able to share their talents and to engage audiences in a larger world. "The best part of the tour was seeing the delight on the faces of our audience after finishing a concert and knowing that even if they had never heard of Dordt College or will not have any contact with us again, we were able to share with them, through the common language of music, the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Reformation sites

The group performed concerts and visited various sites that were critical during the Reformation. One of those was Heidelberg, where the Heidelberg Catechism was written in the 16th century. They also visited Eisenach, birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach. They stopped, too, in Dordrecht, where the Canons of Dort were written, an event that inspired the naming of Dordt College.

The orchestra performed at St. Peter and St. Paul in Eisleben, the church where Luther was baptized and where he preached his final sermon. They also played a concert in Nordhausen, Germany, which was celebrating its 1085th anniversary that weekend.

The group toured Wittenberg's All Saints Church, where on Oct. 31, 1517, Luther posted his 95 Theses on the what was then door of the Castle Church. Orchestra members also made a sombre trip to the site of a World War II Nazi concentration camp.

The orchestra's tour repertoire included the first movement of Hummel's Trumpet Concerto in E-flat featuring Peter Kuipers as soloist, *Pavane* by Gabriel Faure, Mendelssohn's Overture for Winds written when the composer was just 15 years old, and the first movement of Schubert's Symphony No. 6 in C Major.

Some 300 students participate in the music program at Dordt College. There are opportunities for students to perform in four choral groups, two orchestras and three bands.

Researchers: New evidence for ancient origin of the Shroud of Turin

VALENCIA, Spain (CWN) – A new scientific study has added to the body of evidence suggesting that the Shroud of Turin is the burial cloth of Christ, say researchers who have studied the shroud in depth.

Marzia Boi, from the University of the Balearic Islands, is an expert in palynology, the science that studies pollen. She studied pollen found on the shroud and found that the samples were consistent with the flowers and oils typically used in burying the dead in the region of Palestine at the time of Christ. The pollen samples "capture the image of a 2000-year old funeral rite," she said.

Using Boi's research, other Shroud experts say the pollen evidence "creates enormous difficulty for researchers who have claimed that the shroud is a medieval forgery. It is highly unlikely that even a skillful forger of that era would have known which pollens to use, had access to the pollen samples, and thought to embed them in the cloth."

Boi herself has not asserted that the Shroud of Turin is definitively the burial cloth of Christ, but she acknowledges that her discovery is strong proof against the theory of the shroud being a medieval fake.

She wrote in her report, " The pollen traces on the shroud which have so far been linked to the geographic origin of the relic reveal what oils and ointments were put both on the body and on the sheet. These discoveries have an ethnocultural meaning linked to ancient funeral practices. These non-perishable particles capture the image of a 2000-year-old funeral rite, and thanks to them it was possible to discover what plants were used in the preparation of the body that was kept in the sheet. The oils allowed the pollens, as fortuitous ingredients, to be absorbed and hidden in the shroud's fabric like invisible evidence of an extraordinary historical event."

According to Jewish custom dead bodies and the winding sheets were treated with oils and perfumed ointments following a meticulous ritual. The use of this oil in ancient funeral rites is documented in various countries, from Arabia to Greece.

Marzia Boi concluded, "Identifying the main pollen traces found on the shroud captures a snapshot of a funeral rite that followed the customs of Asia Minor, 2000 years ago. They are the components of the most precious oils and ointments of the time and have extraordinarily remained sealed in the fabric… The correct identification of the Helichrysum's pollen, wrongly believed to be that of the Gundelia flower, confirms and guarantees that the body wrapped up in the sheet was an important figure."

Columns

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga

Choosing to believe in faith, hope and love

I had to laugh, like a crazy lady. I laughed while they cried and the Joy of the Lord sang on the CD. It was one of those laugh-or-you'll-cry times, and so we made a cacophony of sound that afternoon drive home, as sweet-voiced singers crooned "I've got joy like a fountain."

I couldn't help but think how joy is nothing the way it sounds, and love isn't either. Love isn't all mush and flowery and Hallmark words and velvet kisses. No, it's pure, stubborn, determination when all you want to do is quit.

And joy isn't some beautiful feeling that percolates in your soul. No, it's the decision to laugh when the world gives you reason to cry. It's the decision to believe in peace, in spite of noise.

I am learning these things, and more. I am learning I can hurt a little boy's feelings by telling him to "shush" when all he wants is to be heard. And I am learning to ask little boys for forgiveness, over and over. To admit I am wrong.

I am learning that it's sometimes okay for them to throw fridge magnets if it means they're actually getting along for once, and that it won't kill me to stop and read stories when I still haven't had my coffee.

But I'm also learning that sometimes I need my coffee. That sometimes I have to pack up a van full of four squirming boys and drive all the way to coffee-break and leave them in nursery before I can get it. And that it's worth it, to sit in a room and discuss the miracles of Jesus and the taking up of cross and the dying, daily, with women whose backs hurt from bowing low to the least of these.

Today Jimmy made his mommy four pictures, because he's going to see her tomorrow. She's throwing him a birthday party and he's been counting down the days, and he made her four pictures because "These will make her happy," he said determinedly, stuffing them into his red backpack, the one that holds his treasures.

Then he put the lids on his markers, and popped bubble wrap because "I like the sound, very much," he said, his eyes glistening with the thrill. And I thought this, too, is joy.

Believing in those that love you. Trying to make them happy. And taking the time to pop bubble wrap because you like the sound – very much.

***

And then there are times when those that love you stop believing in you.

He popped bubble wrap because "I like the sound, very much," he said, his eyes glistening with the thrill.

It's been hard. All four boys sick at the same time and me, rising every hour of the night. The two new boys picking on our own. Our two-year-old starting to hit. And my husband tells me he's worried about me being super-mom, and maybe we should find an alternative solution.

So I decide we're done. We'll find someone else to raise these boys. I leave rambling messages on the machine of a couple who's been trying for children, for years.

And then the people begin to arrive in vans from church, bringing meal after meal, and gifts for the boys – toy cars and balls and books and diapers, so many diapers. One friend sends a card saying, "Don't let the Father of Lies tell you that you can't do it."

And a card from the Home-Ec class, along with food they've made. "To Mr. and Mrs. Wierenga," the card reads. "You guys are real good role models for everyone in this school for taking in those two extra kids. For all the extra time that you have sacrificed to your kids and the other ones, we have made you a quick little meal that you can eat when you don't have enough time to make a nice meal for everyone in your family. We love you."

And all of it, in the same day. The day we'd decided to quit.

The phone never rings.

My husband tells me he's sorry. He says this is God – this whole thing is God – and he was wrong. And I cry and pummel his chest with fists and ask, "Why did you do that? Why did you make me doubt myself?" And all we can do is choose, again, to believe in each other.

Because we're all each other has.

That's all anyone ever needs, including these boys. Someone to believe in them.

I reckon even God needs that, too.

*Emily Wierenga is the author of Chasing Silhouettes: How to Help a Loved One Battling an Eating Disorder (Ampelon Publishing, 2012). Please visit **emilywierenga.com** for more info.*

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

A blessing on the beasts

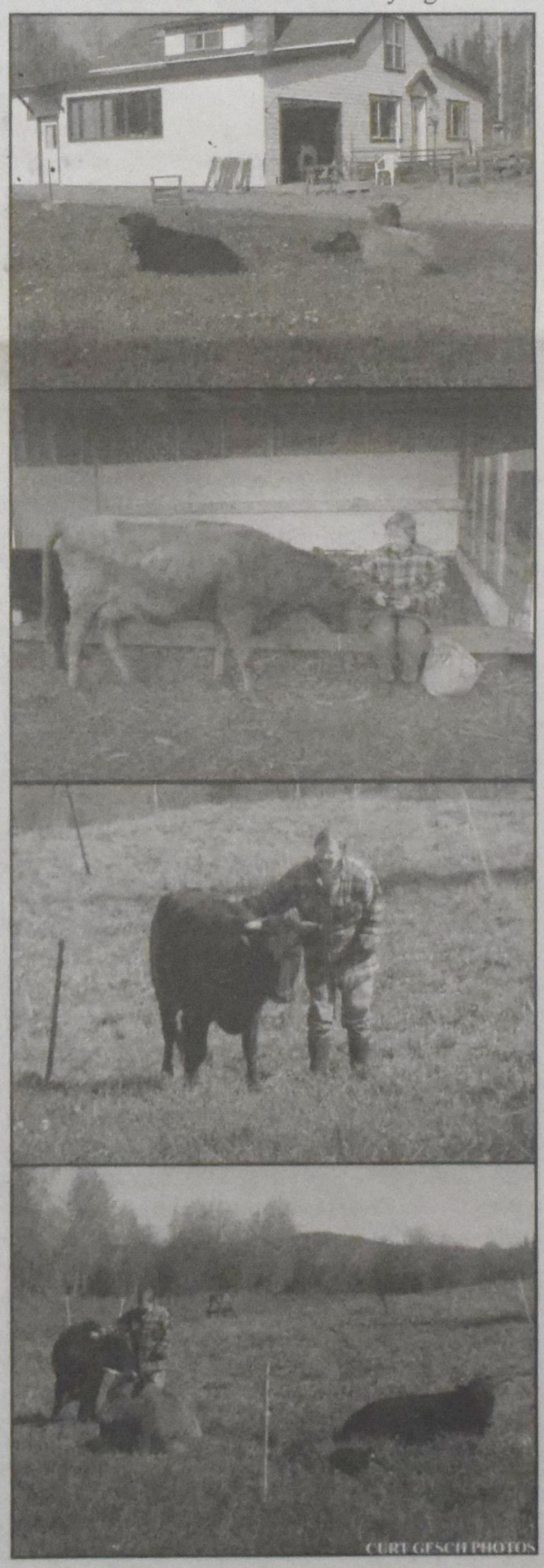
I have learned to be wary of generalizations about animals. Stereotypes, anthropomorphism and sentimentalism may be inaccurate, misleading, comical or just plain stupid.

Take the majestic bull elk. Standing on a high ridge in the Rockies, the bull elk raises his head and bugles forth a challenge to all rivals and perhaps an attractant to receptive cow elk. Then he wanders downhill to his wallow and rolls in a disgusting mess of mud, water, his own semen and urine. Then it's back to being noble, lord of all he surveys. And all that finds him attractive.

Then there is the busy beaver, nature's engineer, which makes dams of sticks and stones, patting mud to a stucco surface. He fells an aspen tree and takes it in sections to his lodge, feed pile or dam. Those of us who have seen actual beaver dams know that the dams often look more like windrows of logging slash than any representation of beaver dams we've ever seen in books or on television. And there are partially-chewed trees all over the banks. Sometimes the trees fall towards the water and sometimes away from it. Occasionally the beaver – knowing nothing of wedges, notches, and wearing safety gear – scrambles away after shouting "Timber!" in beaver-talk, only to run the wrong way into pancake-dom.

Having established my Disney-debunking credibility, I'd now like to say something about cows. Something somewhat sentimental, stereotypical and anthropomorphic. An exhortation, you might say.

If you don't have too many, spending time with cows can be an enriching experience. There are times of frustration of course. Trying to steer a reluctant cow into a trailer or stall is not always conducive to maintaining one's cool. Listening to a cow in heat bellow all night (or listening to a herd of cows calling their weaned calves for two days and nights) may not be very enjoyable.



CURT GESCH PHOTOS

Cows do get sick, get worms, have prolapsed vaginas and uteruses. They sometimes go through fences, bloating when they get into lush alfalfa or break into the grain bin. Flies plague them in the summer, lice in the winter.

Nevertheless, there is great satisfaction sitting still and listening to the rip-scrip sound of grazing. The sounds of cud chewing come second, belches and farts notwithstanding. When Betsey and I bring out lawn chairs to our cows' small pastures, from behind we sometimes feel a wet tongue on our ear or neck; a horn may appear next to our face as if our cow had read *The Book of the Dun Cow* and was somehow comforting us. (The horn also makes us a little uneasy sometimes.)

We watch as Cupcake the calf starts running laps in the tiny field, followed by Liko the steer. Then Patty the mother and Cow the soon-to-be mother start their lumbering run, with udders swinging wildly and making the whole critter look out of balance. But fun they seem to be having. And then it's back to a nibble here, a bite there. And always, after rising or moving, or being nervous, there is the urgent necessity to void the bladder and bowel.

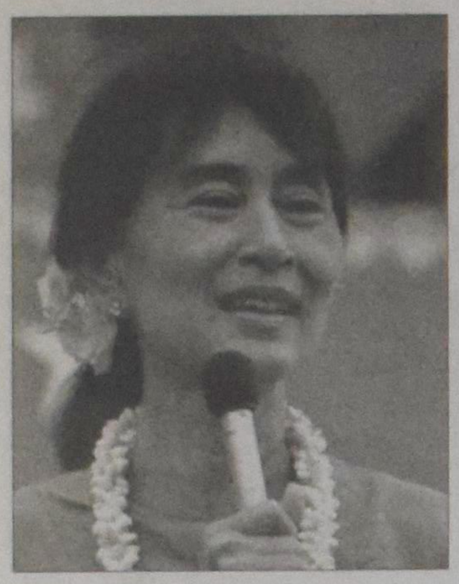
A few awkward gallops aside, our cows present themselves as passive, as accepting. Yes, sometimes eager, but mostly, accepting. They stand, they wait, they eat, regurgitate and allow nature to take its course. I know of no poet who captures the dignity in bovine passivity as well as Seamus O'Sullivan:

My blessing on the patient cows,
Long life, and gentle death – and then
May they on heavenly meadows browse?
Breathing sweet breath into sweet grass,
Fragrance to fragrance, even as when
I see them daily where I pass
On the sweet upland pasture browse;
My blessing on the patient cows.

If it be an error to ascribe patience, a spiritual gift, to a cow, perhaps I may still be inspired by placid bovines to let God work patience in me.

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) may be walking the cows down the lane as you read this. He lives in Quick, B.C., where he learns from Dexter cattle.

Reviews



The Lady
directed by Luc Besson
Mongrel Media, 2012

The Steel Orchid and big screen

Nick Schuurman

July 19, 1947. Aung San Suu Kyi, a two-year-old living in Rangoon, Burma, watches her father as he leaves. While she had no concept of any of it at the time, he was working to finalize the negotiations that would lead Burma to independence from British rule. What she also does not know is that he will not return; he and his colleagues were gunned down by a military death squad later that day.

So begins *The Lady*, director Luc Besson's 2011 depiction of one of the most influential women of the 20th and 21st centuries.

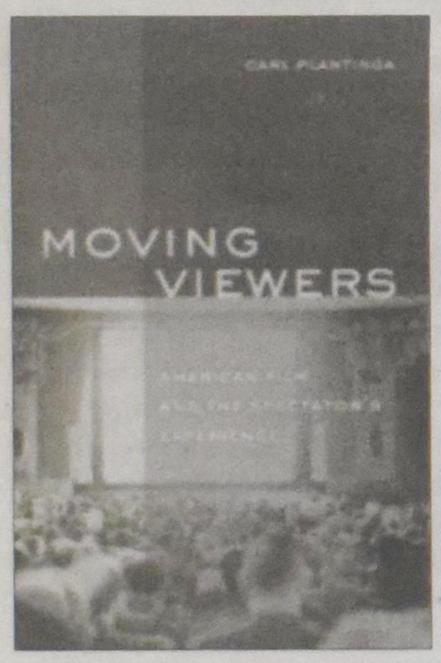
An adult Suu Kyi, played by Michelle Yeo (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*), enters. Married to an Oxford Scholar, Michael Aris, and mother to two sons, she leaves England in 1988 and returns to the country of her birth to be with her now ailing mother. While there, she is shocked and disturbed to witness the violence done by the Burmese military during the pro-democracy demonstrations that followed the resignation of the head of the country's ruling party. Despite the shift to independence, the military maintains a stranglehold on the country.

She is approached by a group of professors who believe that she is the leader that Burma needs to transition out of its current state of instability and promote reform. She accepts the challenge, and forms the National League for Democracy. Despite the party's win in 1990, the military refuses to accept the election's results, and begins work to prevent Suu Kyi from taking further action. She is placed under house arrest, separated from her family, and limited in her means of communication. This pressure continues for more than a decade, despite Aris' efforts and success in seeing Suu Kyi awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Suu Kyi is at one point reunited with Aris, who (having just read the issue of *Time* which featured her on its cover) informs her of just how highly she is esteemed within the international community. "Some are calling you the Steel Orchid," he tells her as they embrace. She shakes her head and begins to list her faults, denying that she is the perfect woman people perceive her to be. Despite that exchange, the film paints a largely monochromatic picture of its hero, and a one-sided presentation of the political conflict. That *The Lady* was written and filmed for a Hollywood audience is most apparent in its accommodation to this desire for clearly-distinguished protagonists and antagonists. The reality of the situation of course was, and continues to be, much more complex and nuanced, and most certainly resistant to the old categories of "good guys" and "bad guys."

Due to the difficult, albeit necessary constraints that accompany the translation of a biography to film, *The Lady* felt a bit rushed. Every five minutes or so, it seemed, someone was boarding a plane and being greeted in another country. To his credit, Besson does his best to condense 67 years of life, as well as decades of marriage, travel and political involvement, into two hours – no easy task. Whether the viewer has, like Suu Kyi, a Ph.D. in Oriental and African Studies, or no prior knowledge of her or the situation whatsoever, the film serves as an historically accurate, yet approachable introduction.

The comparison that has, and will most likely continue to be drawn is that of *Ghandi*, Richard Attenborough's 1982 epic starring Ben Kingsley. Both depict a people struggling to free themselves from oppressive regimes and establish democracy, and both focus on the singular, polarizing individuals that become leaders in that fight. Both feature outstanding performances by incredible actors who spent hundreds of hours studying their respective roles. Unlike Attenborough's project, however, *The Lady*'s protagonist is still alive and fighting. The film ends without conclusion, but on a moving note of hopeful expectation, anticipating that, even decades later, change is still possible.



Moving Viewers
by Carl Plantinga
Los Angeles, California
University of California Press, 2009

Calvin professor explores emotional response to Hollywood film

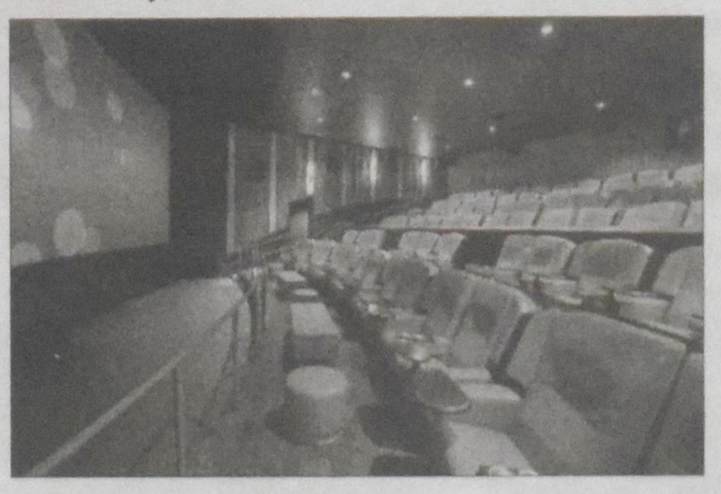
Nick Schuurman

If you are one of the few people who have not seen James Cameron's 1997 blockbuster *Titanic*, allow me to provide a brief synopsis. Jack and Rose meet on the maiden voyage of the Titanic, an enormous passenger ship set to sail across the Atlantic. The two fall in love, despite an unsupporting family and a jealous fiancé. At the peak of the romance, however, the ship collides with an iceberg and begins to sink, sending all of her passengers into a panic and a desperate struggle to escape (here, if you have actually not seen the movie, but one day hope to, skip ahead a couple paragraphs to avoid having an ending spoiled). In the chaotic struggle for survival that follows, Rose is rescued by Jack, who soon thereafter drowns. Rose is devastated, and is left reeling by the tragic loss of her new-found love.

So here's the question: why do we, sophisticated and intelligent North Americans, find a sense of pleasure in watching this story unfold? We might even venture to ask why some readers would find it such a moving experience that they would watch it unfold multiple times (the film, after all, remains among the highest grossing films of cinematic history thus far). It presents to its audience a brutal narrative of incredible pain and loss, and yet millions of men and women have had a positive emotional experience in response to it. Are we all sadists, delighting in the suffering of others?

This blockbuster that recalls the story of the doomed ocean-liner is just one of many case studies that Carl Plantinga, professor of film studies at Calvin college, lays out in *Moving Viewers*, his most recent contribution to the field of film studies. And that question – concerning why movie-goers would willingly subject themselves to the experience of trauma, grief, panic and loss, and respond positively – is just one of many which he considers within the broader field of emotional response to film.

There has been little written regarding the means by which Hollywood (what the author calls "mass-market cinema") films affect individuals on an emotional level. Plantinga suggests a few reasons why this has been the case: in Western culture, there has long been an idea that emotion is somehow antithetical reason, or "an obstruction to logic"; the Marxist and Freudian schools of thought that have for some time dominated film studies have provided frameworks that left no room for questions of that nature; deeply-entrenched sexist attitudes have long associated emotion exclusively with the female gender. The neglect has been unfortunate, given that emotional response constitutes such a significant part of film production and experience. In that sense, *Moving Viewers* is a necessary, albeit dense and academic, book.



Notable are the chapters which he devotes to the question of why viewers subject themselves to the experience of negative emotions like guilt, disgust, horror and fear. Plantinga acknowledges the complexity of both human psychology and the world of emotional play at work within the production and presentation of film. There are many contributing factors, and so a simplistic answer to these questions will not suffice. Plantinga offers a sophisticated, historically-informed response that takes numerous factors into account. Consider, for example, the emotional effect of watching a film on a small black and white television with one speaker, compared to the way in which we are moved while sitting in a theatre, or the difference that is made to our response when the movie's soundtrack is muted.

Given the nature of the book, Plantinga straddles the line between acadmia and pop-culture. So if you have sat through the likes of *Jurassic Park*, *E.T.* or *The Runaway Jury*, and care to know, you'll find in *Moving Viewers* an insight into why you found yourself crying, clenching your fists or gripping the couch cushions in terror. Recommended as a textbook, or for the film-enthusiast.

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is CC's reviews editor.

Medical mission to Ghana, Africa

Glenda Dekkema-de Vries

My New Year's resolution for Jan. 1, 2011, was to do something significant. I didn't know what it would be, but I knew I wanted to fulfill God's expectation, "For everyone to whom much is given, of him shall much be required (Luke 12:48)."

Within the same month, my friend and neighbour Dr. Sarah Barclay came over to visit under the guise of scrapbooking. She didn't seem too interested in the stickers and cut-outs, and she had an intense look on her face. She finally asked me if I would like to join her and the team of 46 health care professionals to work as an R.N. on their next medical mission to Ghana in October/November 2011.

I was so thrilled and delighted because it seemed as if an angel had just come to fulfill my New Year's resolution. Before answering her, I needed to ensure my husband, René, would have assistance to care for our two girls, Emily, eight, and Amanda, 12. His parents, who live in Holland, offered to come to Canada to babysit their only grandchildren.

In preparation for the mission, I read two books: *Where there is No Doctor* by David B. Werner, so I could learn from a medical perspective what the people were dealing with, and a book written by our Ghanaian leader, Dr. David Mensah, *Kwabena: An African Boy's Journey of Faith*. Kwabena is his African name and it means *male, born on a Tuesday*. He took on the name David after becoming a Christian.

A story of transformation

David was born in a small village in Northern Ghana, and raised in idol worship and witchcraft. Through tradition and their idol worship, David was expected to train to become a village assassin, but "circumstance" prevented him from engaging in this life.

While David and his brother were still young, his father died from a strangulated hernia. As was the custom, the sons were not allowed to live with their mother, but with their paternal uncles. These uncles saw David and his brother as cursed because the gods killed their father, so they were ostracized, beaten, deprived of food, warmth and love. The abuse culminated when David's dog, the one being in his life willing to give and receive love, was murdered by the village chief. The chief tried unsuccessfully, through beating and starvation, to make David eat his beloved pet.

After this event, David didn't care anymore about anyone or anything. He organized a violent gang called the Landary boys who beat, stole from and victimized others. One day the Landary boys were looking for trouble when they came upon a group of people gathered around an old man talking about Jesus. David had never heard of such a kind, forgiving and loving God.

He sought out this teacher and learned more about this mysterious God. At that point, he gave his life to Jesus. As the true leader he was born to be, he started an organization to help the poor and orphaned in Northern Ghana. He begged forgiveness from and made amends with those whom he had harmed during his dark days. This organized group of Christians encouraged him to study in Canada at Tyndale (then called the Ontario Bible College). He did that and then went on to get his PhD at the University of Toronto.

Stouffville/Ghana connection

While he was in Canada, David worked during the summer months on the family farm of the Paisleys in Stouffville, Ont. He fell in love with the farmer's daughter, Brenda, and they got married. Despite multiple offers to teach and work in various universities in Canada, David eventually returned to Ghana with his wife and three daughters to continue the mission he had started.

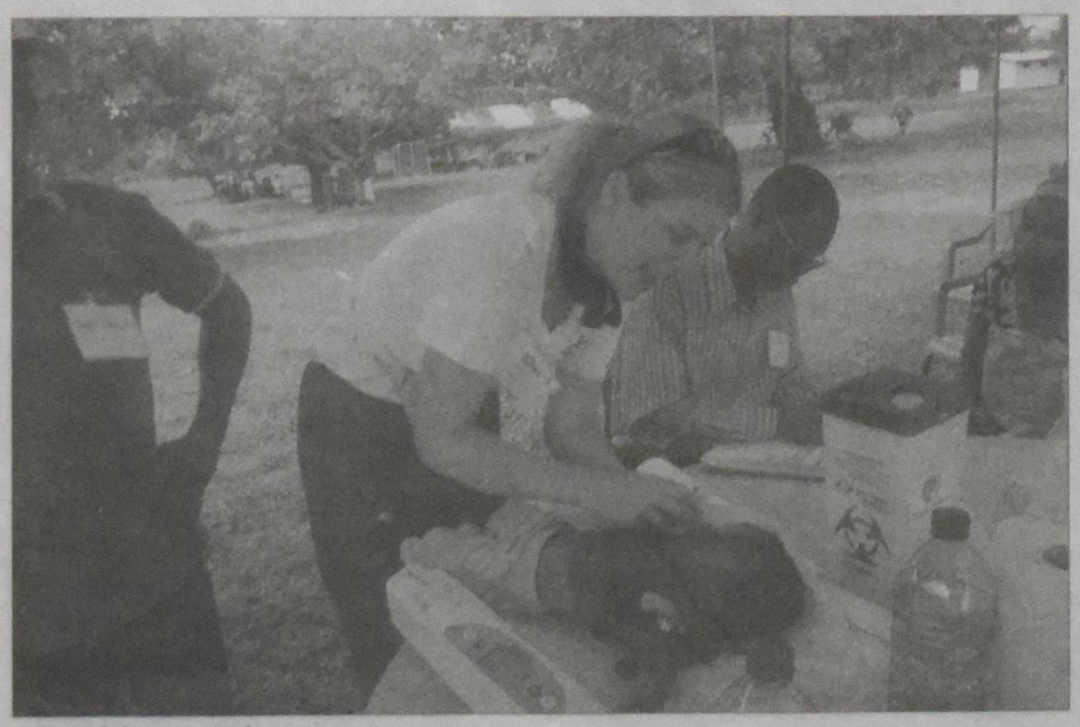
Through his return visits to Stouffville and through the Uxbridge Baptist Church, David met Dr. Jenn Wilson. He told her of the enormous medical needs of Ghana. There are only 17 doctors for 2.5 million people; 98 percent of the people cannot afford the $5 annual fee for medical insurance; many of the district hospitals in Northern Ghana are functioning without a single doctor on staff; there is only one optometrist for the entire region, who is semi-retired; and there are no dentists.

I asked Dr. Kyle Chin, a dentist who has been on several missions, what happens to people with infected teeth when there is no dentist. He explained, "The tooth rots, and then the gum underneath rots as well, and eventually the tooth falls out."

The medical mission was born

In 2007 the first medical mission went to Ghana under the leadership of Dr. Jenn Wilson. Since that time, the mission returns each year with regular and new team members. Their mandate is to follow Jesus' command to visit the sick and to provide medical care until Northern Ghana is able to provide its people with sustainable health care.

Malaria is the number one cause of death in Ghana. On my first trip we tested everyone who had a fever for malaria and we treated those who tested positive. The adults are usually immune to malaria because they have built up a resistance to the disease if they were lucky enough to survive the first time they contracted the disease. It is the children who are the most vulnerable. The second most common cause of death is upper respiratory infections followed by diarrhea. We treated 10,000 people for worms. The fourth leading killer is untreated skin infections. One pediatrician on our staff stated that 25 percent of the children he saw had Yaws, a bacterial infection on their legs.



Cheerful care and compassion.

At one point the husband of a woman giving birth to twins came running to our compound asking for help. His wife had delivered healthy twins, but she was hemorrhaging badly. A team of health care professionals grabbed their medical supplies, jumped in a taxi and went out to the small village to help. They were able to stop the bleeding through the use of the drug oxytocin administered by IV, and they were able to save that young mother's life.

A man with a severe hernia being carried to the clinic.

In addition to our medical mission, a team of surgeons and surgical nurses called Operation Hernia, mostly from the UK, accompanied us. They performed 288 surgical procedures. Several of these patients entered the operating theatre unable to walk and left at the end of the day able to walk home. "And the lame shall walk," rang in my ears.

The optometrist team, consisting of Dr. Martin McDowell, Nurse Marion Hurlburt, and several local health care staff, were able to treat hundreds of blind or partially-blind Ghanaians. Some people were led into the clinic on a loved one's arm and were able to leave independently. Some left dancing. "And the blind shall see," rang in my ears.

The dental team, consisting of Dr. Kyle Chin and Nurse Amanda Bartodziej, were able to treat hundreds of people with a toothache, mostly through tooth extraction. There are no Bible texts for this, but if there were, it would sound something like, "And the tooth shall ache no more."

It was truly a miraculous adventure. Miracles were happening all around us, miracles that I don't usually recognize as such in Canada. I struggled with this for a while. Does God only perform miracles in Africa?

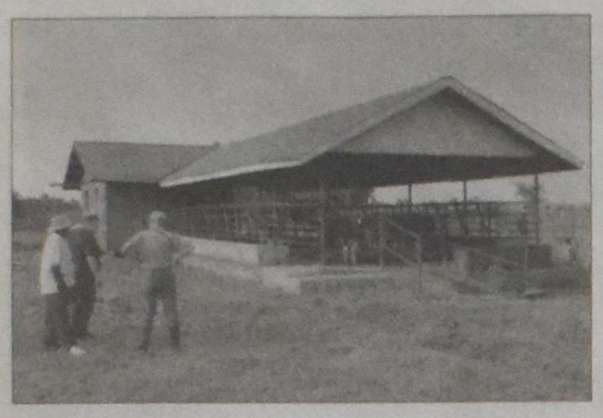
After returning home, I looked up the word for miracles in the dictionary: "A miracle is a wonderful happening that is contrary to the known laws of nature OR it is something marvellous, a wonder." Even though these individuals were in the hands of highly-trained health care professionals, the healings were still miraculous and in the hands of God. And of course, miracles don't only happen in Africa.

For two weeks our team was able to fulfill God's expectation: "For everyone to whom much is given, of him shall much be required." Now, what about the other 50 weeks of the year?

For more information about the Ghana Rural Integrated Development and the Northern Empowerment Association, please go to ***grid-nea.com.***

Glenda Akua (female born on a Wednesday) Dekkema-de Vries is a freelance writer who lives in Stouffville, Ont., with her husband and two children.

Farming in faith



Cathy Smith

"A dairy maid can milk cows to the glory of God," said Martin Luther. With support from Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM), the Pentecostal Theological College of Uganda is putting this radical idea to the test. Theology students are learning to care for dairy cattle and identify themselves, not only as pastors, but as farmers. Rev. Dr. Mwaya Wa Kitavi, CRWM's Regional Director in Eastern and Southern Africa, cites the example of the Apostle Paul, missionary tentmaker, and says, "These pastors will need to make a living, possibly as farmers, once they start to open churches and worship centers in Uganda."

Wa Kitavi explains, "CRWRC has been working with Pentecostal Assemblies of God-Uganda (PAG-U) for more than two decades already. The leaders of the PAG-U appreciated the CRWRC's transformational approach to development and wondered whether their pastors could be trained with such a biblical life and worldview. The CRWRC invited the CRWM to assist. PAG-U assigned CRWM representatives to work with the Pentecostal Theological College (PTC). PTC had a 20-acre piece of land and wanted it developed as a dairy farm. Upon discussion, the partner organizations agreed to not just develop a dairy farm, but link it to the school, hence creating a Department of Community Transformation. Here future pastors will learn community development skills that supplement their pastoral training." In 2009 Calvin College seminarian Anthony Sytsma did his internship at the PTC, introducing that holistic Reformed perspective – farming and preaching can **both** be a part of a God-glorifying ministry. Guest educators from the Christian Reformed Church continue to be involved at the PTC.

The partnership between CRWM and the PTC is a carefully-structured strategy laid out in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by both parties. Additionally, there is an Accountability Team of ten members, overseeing the financial aspects of the endeavour, monitoring the operation of the farm and ensuring that CRWM funds and donations go directly into the *Farming in Faith* ministry.

Garry Sytsma (centre) surrounded by members of the Accountability Team.

Dr. Wa Kitavi stresses that what churches lack in Uganda is strong leadership. He says, "The church in Africa is a1000 miles wide, but a quarter of an inch deep." Leaders are often called to serve the church even before they receive education and training, resulting in a general shallowness of theological awareness in the church as a whole. "You can't give what you don't have," Wa Kitavi elaborates, "or take others where you have never been." One tactic to meet this deficit is a scholarship program. CRWM sponsors eight students at the PTC. One of those students, Emmanuel Okwalinga, is already a leader in charge of pastoral training in the PAG-U. He introduces himself as "a peasant farmer and pastor." "Back home," says Okwalinga, "people say they have seen a transformation in my servanthood." He plans to attend Calvin Seminary next year to study for his Master's degree. Okwalinga's desire to minister more effectively is precisely the kind of result that the *Farming in Faith* partnership was designed to foster.

Caring about cows

Garry Sytsma, a member of Ebenezer CRC in Jarvis, is a volunteer advocate for the East Africa ministry of Dr. Wa Kitavi. He is also a member of the Accountability Team for the *Farming in Faith* project. "The total investment at this point is in the neighbourhood of $100, 000," says Sytsma. Funds come from individual donors, supportive churches and fundraising events. Recently, Ancaster CRC focused attention on the *Farming in Faith* project. The deacons challenged the church council as a whole to raise $1500 and then invited the congregation to match that amount. When Dr. and Mrs. Wa Kitavi visited the church, they were presented with a cheque for $5775 and several plush stuffed cows. "We were pleased with the interest and results," says Teresa Boer-Gravelle, a deacon. "In fact, donations continued to come in and people wanted to be able to purchase feed and supplies. We posted pictures of the actual cows on bulletin boards, so there was a real sense of ownership of the project!"

Left: Farm in 2010. Above: Expansion and growth of the farm by 2011.

Sytsma has been to Uganda three times to track the progress of the farm. Passionate about the *Farming in Faith* effort, he works to raise awareness and to solicit support in Canada. He has interesting anecdotes to share. One Sunday he and others experienced a rough time getting to church in Masaailand. Their truck got stuck; it took considerable time and effort to get free. The landscape was vast, with no sign of human presence anywhere. Moments before they reached the church, he took a photo of a zebra herd grazing on the open plain. When they arrived, there were only a few women under a tree, cooking food in a pot. He wondered if anyone else would even be at the service! Then, suddenly, seemingly from out of nowhere, the church filled up with worshippers. The contrast of the empty stretches of land and the full church struck him powerfully. God was working in this place.

The *Farming in Faith* endeavour is a unique example of Christian partnership between faith communities, integrating both physical and spiritual goals. A theological college and a barn, side by side. Luther would be pleased.

Interested in knowing more about Farming in Faith? Contact Garry Sytsma at ghsytsma@gmail.com.

'I will give you what I have – prayer': An interview with Rev. Dr. Wa Kitavi

You've led a fascinating life, Dr. Wa Kitavi. Tell us about yourself and your family.

I was born in a non-Christian home in Kenya. My parents were African Traditional Religionist to the core. It was not until I was 15 years old that I came to know the Lord. A young person I knew went to college and was converted by a missionary. He returned to our village and organized meetings for young people. I attended out of curiosity. He talked about Jesus and said, "Do you know there is no eternal life in the African religion?" I went back to a second and third meeting. By the fourth meeting, he prayed over me and I accepted Christ. The decision to follow Christ collided with my family's beliefs in ancestral worship. My mother was a *shagom* (medicine lady) who was consulted widely. For more than 30 years, I prayed for her. Five years ago, at age 85, she came to know Jesus.

My relationship with my father is also quite a story. I was born into a polygamous family. My father had four wives, my mother being the fourth and the youngest. My father was an alcoholic, but he was also the chief of our village. He provided a piece of land for my mother, but interacted with us rarely. My mother was the one who raised me.

Late in life, at 85, my father became sick to the point of death, not moving from his bed for four days. He refused to go to the hospital, believing that doctors simply give you medicine to make you die. I was teaching nearby and told him, "I will give you what I have – prayer." I laid my hands on him and prayed for him." He got better and was able to leave his bed. He called the villagers together. They were expecting a farewell announcement from a dying man, but, in front of all of them, my father asked me to pray for him again. From that time on, our relationship changed. We became close. He lived until he was 105 years old.

After having lived in the United States for twenty-five years, my wife Munyiva and I are back in Kenya, where we were born and raised. Both of us are involved in CRWM ministry. Munyiva oversees the Timothy Leadership Training program for our region. We have four adult children who still live in the U.S. That is a challenge, of course, being away from our children.

Some of our readers might find a partnership between Christian Reformed World Missions and Pentecostal Theological College puzzling. How has this collaboration worked out in practice?

The partnership has turned out to be a perfect fit. The CRWM brings that biblical life and worldview to PAG-U. PAG-U helps CRC missionaries learn how to plant churches, employ different styles of worship and open up other opportunities to learn about church in Africa.

What are some of the struggles and rewards you've encountered in your current ministry?

Like Johanna Veenstra in Nigeria, I am a pioneer, the first in this work. There is much to be done and it takes time. We have a five-point ministry plan: leadership development, theological education for pastors and leaders, Christian education that integrates faith and learning, church plants with a focus on unreached peoples and the *Farming in Faith* project. It's a struggle sometimes, having too many needs and

....Continued on page 16

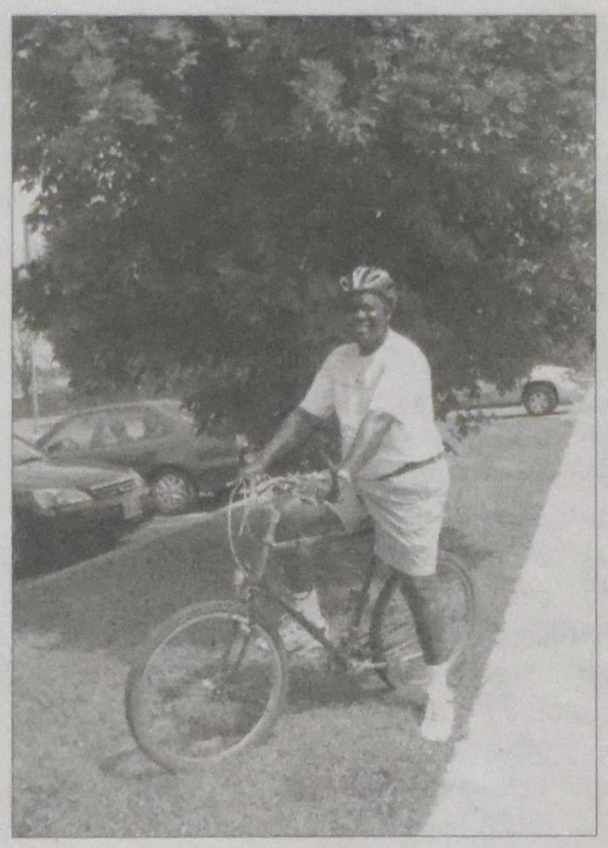
Features

Multicultural relationships: experiencing a taste of heaven

An interview with Moses Moini

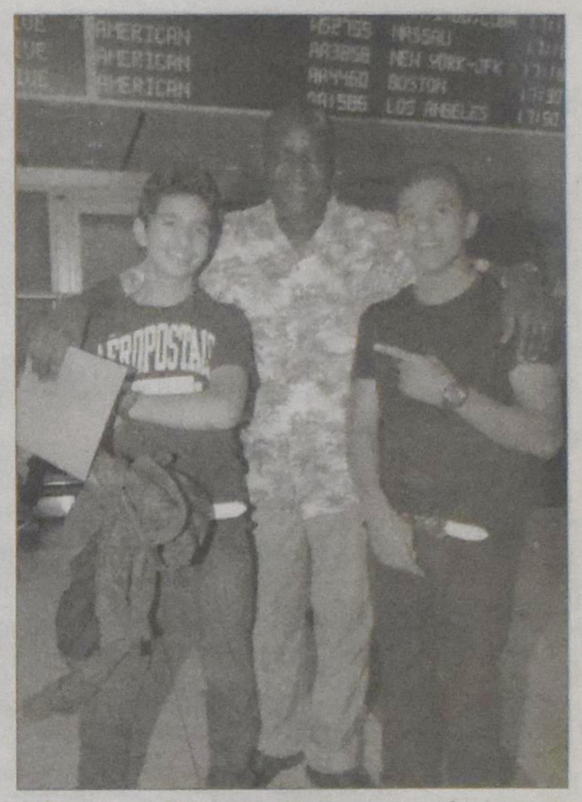
Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

About twenty years ago, Moses Moini came to Canada as a refugee from Sudan. *Christian Courier* interviewed him to find out about his journey and what he learned along the way about God's intentions for a multicultural church.



Training for the annual Ride for Refuge.

With a sponsor and a newly-arrived family from Iraq.



Moses at Pearson International Airport waiting for the arrival of the uncle of these two young men from Damascus.

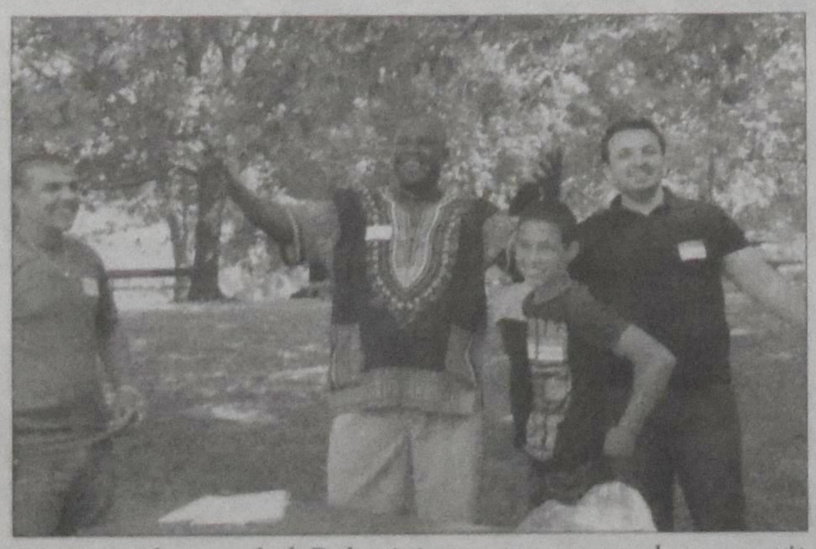
Tell us about yourself. Where are you from? Where did you flee to as a refugee and why? When did you come to Canada? How did you become connected to Christians here? What is your current position?

I hail from Kajo Kaji district in the **new** nation of the Republic of South Sudan. Growing up as one of six children in the family, life in the rural district of Kajo Kaji was not only difficult, but also challenging in myriad ways. Our main economic activity was subsistence agriculture. Though I liked working our small pieces of land, one of my interests was in education. Education, as I knew it, had helped with the transformation of our community, but there was still so much to be desired in terms of development.

After primary school, I joined high school in 1983. My joining of the high school unfortunately coincided with the outbreak of the second Sudanese civil war which claimed the lives of roughly two million people. As the war built up momentum in the Upper Nile province of South Sudan, fear and panic filled the air though the situation remained relatively calm in the other southern provinces. The relative peace in our district helped with my completion of high school and subsequent admission to the University of Juba in 1987.

Though admission to the university brought me a step closer to acquiring the first degree in our family, conflict between the administration and the Student Union thwarted that dream. Coupled with the escalation of the war and the advancement of the rebels toward Juba, I was forced to flee to Uganda in 1989.

In the refugee camp in Uganda, I was reunited with my parents and thousands of other refugees who had already fled from other parts of Southern Sudan. While life in Sudan was challenging, the experience in the refugee camp was not only depressing but had the potential to squash any dream or hope for the future. Left with no choice, I and the many other refugees opted to hang onto life. It was that determination and courage that focused me in the search for opportunities for education. Four years later, the dream to continue my studies was resurrected when I was informed that I had been admitted to Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont., under the sponsorship of the World University Services of Canada in partnership with Covenant Christian Reformed Church.



Moses with resettled Palestinians at an annual community event in Waterloo.

On Oct. 19, 1992, I left my country of exile, Uganda, for Canada. Though I had read about Canada in my Primary Three Geography textbook, I had never imagined that one day it was going to be my home. Since I arrived, much has happened. Life in refuge is nothing short of a life in limbo. Being one out of millions of refugees to be chosen to resettle in St. Catharines was not a coincidence. When I arrived in Canada, I landed right into the hospitality of the members of Covenant Christian Reformed Church and have been adopted into the community.

After completing my studies at Brock, I returned to Africa where I served for three years with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) in Tanzania. Back in Canada, I joined CRWRC's Refugee Sponsorship Program and held the position of an Associate Coordinator till April 2008. Currently, I coordinate the Refugee Sponsorship Program for the Mennonite Central Committee in Ontario. Together with my wife and our son, we live in St. Catharines, Ont.

When you arrived in Canada, how did you experience integrating into a different cultural setting, especially within the Christian community? What ongoing challenges do you face? If any, how do you deal with those challenges?

Challenging, but also rewarding. The worship style at church was less vibrant compared to what I knew in Sudan or Uganda. Members seem to have designated seats and be grouped as families. I liked that the worship service was for about an hour and a half. I loved the fellowship after church and how I was enfolded into the church family. I still struggle with the worship, but I am also aware that I am a minority in a compassionate and caring community. Being accorded the opportunity to participate in services, reading Scripture in my own language and singing songs from different parts of the world has helped address some of the challenges.

From what you have learned from refugees and their Christian sponsors, how do individuals and the Christian community benefit from multicultural relationships?

Multicultural relationships open our churches, our lives and ourselves to people from other cultures and provide us with the most immediate, challenging and joyful opportunity to encounter God and to live out God's will and Jesus' example as Christians. Multicultural relationships stretch our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. Through multicultural relationships, the Christian community connects with and extends the love of Christ. In this manner, we are refusing to divide the world into enemy and friend. Jesus did that all the time – breaking down the barriers, the walls of hostility between people. Multicultural relationships are transformative and help us to discover new ways of doing things and to develop a global perspective.

Multicultural relationships help bridge many different parts of the world. They make people understand and appreciate various cultures. Through multicultural relationships, we can experience a taste of heaven as people of different racial or cultural backgrounds intermingle with others without necessarily sticking out. Though the global church can only be housed in a community where multicultural relationships exist, understanding and appreciating various cultures can be challenging.

What steps can Christians take to encourage healthy multicultural relationships? How can the church more accurately reflect the vision of Rev. 15:4: "All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed?"

I would suggest intentionality on the part of the church. On the International Day of Prayer, for example, have the flags of different nations on display, as represented by the members. Members should be encouraged to wear the clothes worn in their home countries. The Bible should be read in many languages and the Lord's Prayer said in many tongues simultaneously. Worship songs from various parts of the world with translations need to be encouraged. Celebrations with international food from where people come from can also promote unity in diversity.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

'In Adam's fall we sinned all'

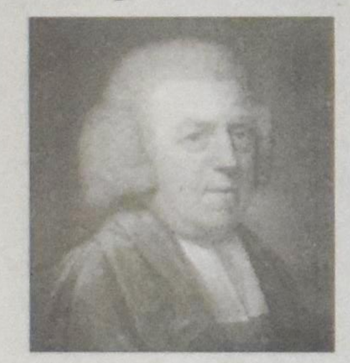
At the outset of the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that "we are not our own" but belong "body and soul, in life and in death" to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. The catechism forces each of us to consider and confess this individually, in first-person singular. There's no retreating into a communal "we." What is *my* comfort? That *I* am not my own.... This biblical truth is what is essential and real in our world of woe. It is the sum of life lived unto God our Creator and Redeemer.

If that summary is the forest, then the catechism pulls back to begin looking at the trees. So it asks: *What must I know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?* In answer, each of us confesses, "First, how great my sin and misery are."

First? Is it any wonder that Calvinists have been accused of being killjoys? Do we have to start with "total depravity"? Yes, actually we do. In Adam's Fall we severed ourselves from the God who created us very good, in his own image, for his glory and reflecting that glory. We doomed ourselves: "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). And: "There is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10 quoting Ps. 14). And: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Paul's words slam against our self-interested wills and notions of personal goodness and deserving. Post-Fall sin-poisoned human nature infuses me with "a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbour" (Lord's Day 2), and our own sin also condemns us. We can't get off the hook by blaming Adam and Eve.

But, come on! That's overstated, isn't it? *Hate* God and my neighbour? I ignore God at times, it's true. And there are some people I don't like. But *hate*?

Yes, hate – because our fallen human will is in bondage to sin. Enslaved. By nature we are "so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil" (Lord's Day 3; Gen. 6:5, 8:21; Job 14:4; Isa. 53:6; John 3:3-5). And the stench of human sin is a daily affront to God's supreme majesty (says the catechism). The opinion of many notwithstanding, our "free will" is not free – until or unless we are born again by the Spirit of God. It is impossible to overestimate the extent to which sin has enslaved us and even all of creation. The whole creation is groaning in travail, says Paul, awaiting Christ's consummation of all things.



Former slaver John Newton's "Amazing Grace" – perhaps the most famous Christian hymn – asks us to acknowledge that God's grace "saved a wretch like me."

A wretch like me

Eighteenth century hymn writer and former slaver John Newton has us acknowledge that God's amazing Grace "saved a wretch like me." With Isaac Watts we sing (or used to sing in the pre-1987 *Psalter Hymnal*), "Alas! And did my Saviour bleed … for such a worm as I?" But these days most of us find it much more palatable to focus on God's love, not our own natural wretchedness. Indeed, God's love is boundless. God *is* love (1 John 4:8). But he would not be love if he were unjust or unholy – which he would become if he winked at sin and shrugged off its deserved punishment. A picture of God's mercy and love without God's justice and wrath is a distorted picture.

Let me enlist aid from the June 3 "Desiring God" blog where Jonathan Parnell puts it very well: "God's mercy really is incomprehensible apart from God's wrath. Paul tells us, 'Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess. 1:10). And it becomes clear that if we are to know the depths of this deliverance we must know more about this wrath from which we are delivered. Leon Morris writes, *The use of the concept of propitiation witnesses to two great realities, the one, the reality and the seriousness of the divine reaction against sin, and the other, the reality and the greatness of the divine love which provided the gift which should avert the wrath from men.…Unless we give real content to the wrath of God, unless we hold that men really deserve to have God visit upon them the painful consequences of their wrongdoing, we empty God's forgiveness of its meaning* (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross,* 211, 213). This means at least one thing: all talk of the love of God without explanation of who God is might as well be an episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood*. Isolated from the greatness of God, we stifle the wonder of the gospel and short-circuit our joy. We bleach its goodness. Let us remember then – and be glad – that God rich in mercy and great in love is thus because he is a God who feels indignation everyday, who holds a cup of foaming wine, and who is a consuming fire" (Eph. 2:4, Ps. 7:11;75:8; Deut. 4:24).

So, yes, the first thing I must understand is "how great my sin and misery are," and that if God is to be God, he cannot overlook that sin. I need to know my disease before I can grasp the cure. Thanks be to God there *is* a Cure. (Next month we'll talk about it.)

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Artful Eye

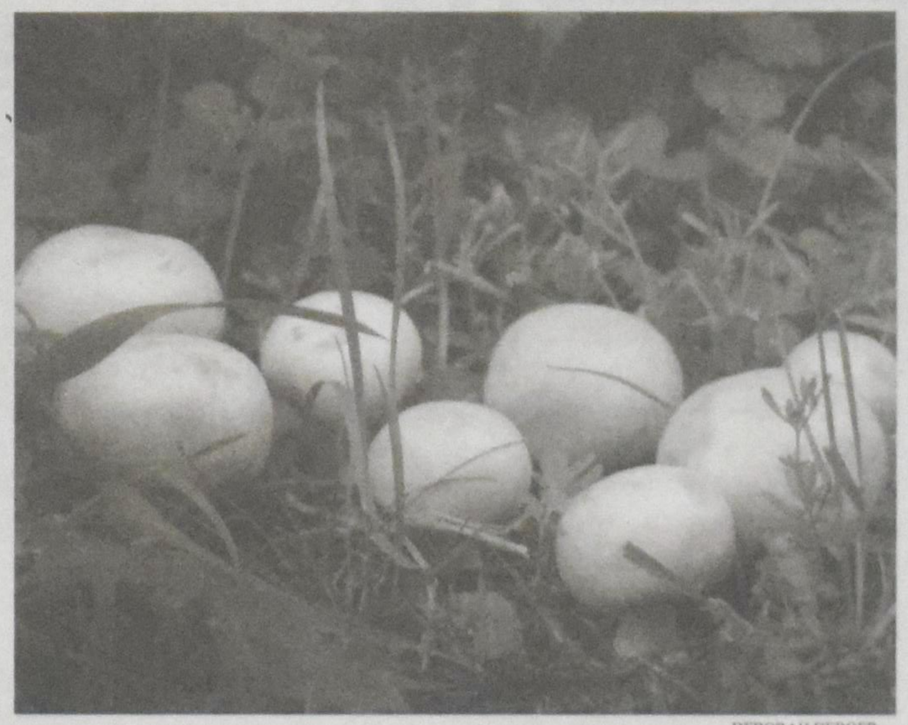
JOE VELTMAN

Small Change

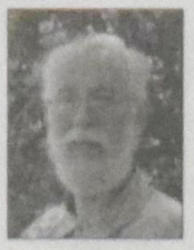
In His Presence
even scattered mushrooms,
quarter-sized
with silvery sheen
are seen
with other eyes,
changed
by His magnificence.

Since none but God and I
are here to see,
I will say so you
may hear to see,
and gather with me
the small change
of His munificence.

Joe Veltman



DEBORAH DEBOER



Joe Veltman is the pastor of Calvary Community Church in New Berlin, Wis. He enjoys photography, writing poetry and many other hobbies.

Deborah DeBoer is a photographer living in Wyoming, Ont. She is married to Murray and together they are raising seven childen.

Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Jesus everywhere

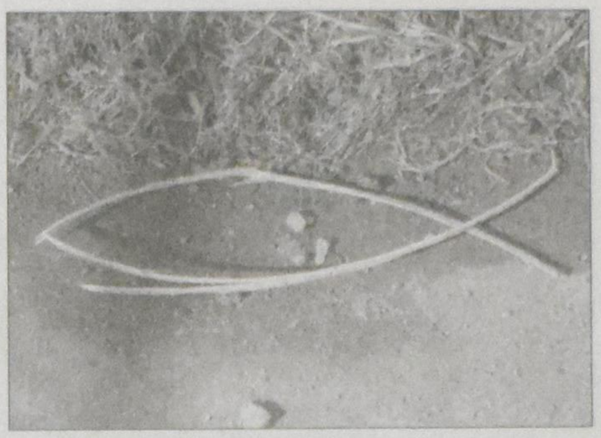
I've noted before that I'm susceptible to the frequent lament of Christians that Christianity is fast-fading from our culture. I worry about the church in a world that seems indifferent, even hostile to the faith. But it's not just Christians who are feeling burdened by a decline in commonly-held values. Our culture as a whole is foundering in a tidal wave of pessimism. "*In Nothing We Trust*" (*National Journal*, Apr. 19, 2012) explores how trust in any "public good" has plummeted. The authors note that seven in 10 Americans believe their country is on the wrong track, naming a loss of hope in government, banks, business and media spokespersons. Additionally, "Less than half the population expresses 'a great deal' of confidence in the public-school system or organized religion." Sociologist Laura Hansen sums up: "We have lost our gods."

It just so happens that I recently embarked on my own non-scientific experiment and came to a conclusion that speaks to this malaise. I was on one of my daily walks, my brain a furious whorl of thought about the intersection of faith and culture, when a fish-shaped twig on the ground impinged my peripheral vision. I had to laugh at my hyper-spirituality. I was seeing Jesus everywhere! Next thing you know, I scolded myself, you'll be seeing Jesus's face in the spaghetti and sending photos of your supper to all your Facebook friends!

But, just for fun, I started logging how often Christian images intruded on my consciousness apart from my regular devotions and church-related activities. That night I happened to watch "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo." Well, to clarify, tried to watch. I spent a good part of the movie averting my eyes, the nudity and violence verging on voyeuristic. But I was surprised to note that the protagonist's daughter was a Christian. She wears a cross, says grace before a meal, and informs her dad she is heading off to Bible camp. Moreover, she is the one who oh-so-casually solves a puzzling mystery for her journalist father, identifying a series of number sequences as Scripture verses. I kept waiting for her to be reviled, ridiculed or victimized, but it never happened. In fact, she is portrayed as a subtle redemptive influence on her callous and self-absorbed parent.

Strange places

Over and over again, as I paid attention, Jesus was there in my world. His cross was everywhere, sometimes in admittedly strange places like hanging on the neck of Steven Tyler (*American Idol*), or Teresa Lisbon (a character on *The Mentalist*), or on the wrist band of rap singer Flo Rida in his music video "I get a good feeling." Mark and I watched a documentary series together on the Vietnam War. All kinds of crosses there, hanging with dog tags on teenage chests – chunky wooden ones on leather thongs, gold or silver ones on



"A fish-shaped twig on the ground impinged my peripheral vision. I had to laugh ... I was seeing Jesus everywhere!"

chains. Country band Rascal Flatts sang an openly Christian song on a recent *Dancing with the Stars* episode. So did contestant Colton Dixon before he was eliminated on *American Idol*.

Jesus flashes on my Facebook page as well, in posts from fellow-Christians, in ads (Play Gospel Adventure!), or in news clips and shared links. References run the gamut from earnest to stupefyingly pious to plainly offensive.

And then there's the world of serious journalism. *National Geographic's* March cover story was "In the Footsteps of the Apostles." The same month *Huffington Post* ran a story called "Seven Reasons Why Young Adults Quit the Church." *Newsweek's* April cover featured a well-groomed hipster Jesus. Publishing trade mag *Folio* reports that having Jesus on the cover pumps up sales by 45 percent.

I didn't exert myself in any way to find these examples. Jesus was simply omnipresent in my day-to-day media consumption. How does this all pull together for me? Post-Easter 2012, like my homeboy Thomas, I'm sheepishly reminded: Jesus is still alive and well. He is risen indeed. He "ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end." That consummation proclaimed in the Nicene Creed may come in ways I don't expect or fathom. I may decry these images of Jesus in the maw of a ravening media monster. I may worry (Lord, help my unbelief) that, unlike his servant Jonah, he might be consumed beyond his ability to be spit out whole from the belly of such a leviathan.

But Jesus won't be counted out. That ballooning despair expressed by seven in 10 regarding the "gods" of our culture has the potential to trigger a gold rush, to propel a massive sifting through a mountain of dirt for something of value – something more precious, more lasting, more genuine than the superficial connectedness of social media or the soothing drone of the entertainment factory – something more like a "living Stone" (1 Peter 2:4). Jesus is still moving souls to seek him in the 21st century. It's his reality show, after all.

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Getting Unstuck

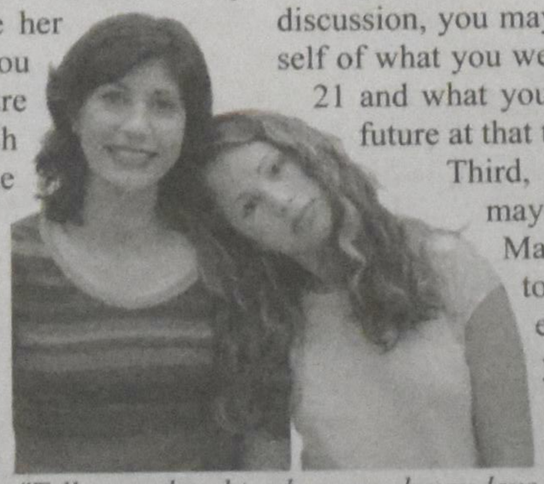
Arlene Van Hove

Single parenting

Q. I am 36 and a single parent with a 15-year-old daughter. We attend a conservative but supportive church. Before my daughter was born I decided not to marry her father because it would not have worked out. He is presently married and has two children ages 10 and 8. My daughter visits her father and his family two or three times a month depending on their schedule. After the shock of my pregnancy wore off, my parents supported my decision and they have been a stable influence in our lives. I always hoped to marry some day but so far it has not happened. My present concern is my daughter's frequent accusations that I should have married her father. She readily accepted my decision not to marry him when she was younger, but now she questions my judgment in this regard and accuses me of not giving her a normal family. While she was a happy kid and a good student during her elementary school years, she is now moody and full of accusations. Her school work is suffering.

R. I can understand your daughter's ambivalence about your decision years ago not to marry her father. Your previous explanations may no longer resonate with her as she is growing up to be a young woman. You may need to have more discussions with her and possibly on a deeper level. However, her wish for her parents to be together is normal and she may need to re-grieve the impossibility of that which cannot be.

My first suggestion is to listen carefully to your daughter. While her accusations may put you on the defensive, you are the adult so try to flesh out what her bottom line could be. Are her friends or classmates giving her a bad time now that she is in high school? Does she feel less accepted by her peers because she is from a single parent family? Could she give you a picture of how she thinks life would be for her now if you had married her father? In other words, where is she coming from? Be prepared to validate her feelings and opinions.



"Tell your daughter how much you love her and how she has enriched your life and what hopes you have for her future."

Second, while I am not in favour of parents telling children intimate details of their lives, it is important you let her know in an appropriate way why you decided not to marry her father. I would like to warn you against painting him as the villain and encourage you to focus more on mutual incompatibilities. In preparation for your discussion, you may need to remind yourself of what you were like when you were 21 and what your hopes were for your future at that time.

Third, the above process may be unsettling for you. Many of us would like to keep painful experiences in the past, but your daughter's struggles are legitimate and need to be addressed. While there are times to let the past rest, your daughter's accusations may well be part of her developmental process and it could be helpful for her if you could be straightforward. Let her know your brokenness is part of who we are as human beings and accepting this aspect of ourselves helps us put our faith in the grace of God. Should you need support, you could confide in your parents or your pastor since both seem to be supportive of you and your daughter.

Finally, tell your daughter how much you love her and how she has enriched your life and what hopes you have for her future. Remind her that God also has a plan for her life and that she can contribute to his world through her own unique strengths and gifts. As for yourself, I believe to raise a child on one's own can be an act of courage and while your daughter's environment may not expose her to a variety of family structures, many children from single parent families – who have support and a reasonable standard of living – do very well in their lives.

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Columns

Our World Today

Bert Hielema

The era of fear

The American Department of Homeland Security has 230,000 employees, of which 30,000 are equipped with electronics that monitor every telephone call and every e-mail: be careful what you whisper or write, because the CIA now stands for "Collecting Information Anonymously." The total cost for spying on all of us is $49 billion, more than twice the entire Canadian Air Force-Navy-Army budget of $22 billion.

In the past the U.S. government mobilized for wars, and de-mobilized after. No longer: the war on terror is "War without end. Amen." The U.S. may have declared victory, but it looks more like a victim than a victor. It resembles a scared security seeker, prying into every person's private prattle.

Welcome to the new era of fear and of a future failing any safeguards. Gone are the days when the skills with which a person entered a profession or job would last a working life time. Gone are the days when a person could reasonably expect a comfortable retirement after a successful career. Gone are the days when good health care was guaranteed, when weather was predictable, when governments provided financial security in old age.

Our fears span the globe. We fear that Islam will overtake the world, so we view every dark face or every burka with suspicion and suspect bombs under their belts. After decades of openness we are back to barricaded borders.

Our fears are local too. We fear that dangers lurk in polluted water, in incurable infections, in tainted meat, in minute microbes, in tricky ticks, in dengue fever, in yet un-named ailments for which no cure is available.

Europe fears that the entire concept of the Euro was a momentous mistake, pushed by Germany, the main beneficiary of this move. Everyone fears that the welfare state that my generation has enjoyed is coming to an end.

Not unreasonable

These fears are well founded. How can we save for retirement when money earns less than the rate of inflation? How can young people save anyhow when jobs have gone global, going to the lowest bidder? How can the next generation pay off the national debt and its educational debt when incomes are down but costs are up? And what about climate change with more drought, flooding and food insecurity?

The 20th century saw not only the fight against fascism and communism, but, in the second half, liberal provisions for public health care and universal pensions that gave people protection against all ills, whether economic, physical or old age. This was made possible by high taxation and by religiously banking on economic growth. Now staggering deficits prevent governments from being everything for everybody, while the unintended consequences of century-long extravagance, courtesy of carbon-based living, are evident in booming populations, weird weather, sharply reduced growth, and looming commodity shortages. All this signals extreme uncertainty. Whereas familiarity breeds contempt, unfamiliarity fosters fear.

We just have had another G-20 meeting, this time in Mexico. The press releases stated that the world's leaders discussed economic stabilization and structural reforms as foundations for growth and employment, vowed to strengthen the financial system and strive for financial inclusion to promote economic growth, and promised to improve the international financial architecture in an interconnected world while pledging moneys to finance food security and address commodity price volatility. All of this is pure bull's bowel products. They even talked about promoting sustainable development, green growth and the fight against climate change: equally empty expressions, because no state still has the money or the political power to implement these lofty goals. We might as well call the G-20 the G-ZERO as zilch is the result.

G-20 leaders prepare to pose at the Toronto summit in 2010.

Is all doom and gloom? Of course not. I John 4:18 says: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives our fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

Is that a cheap way out? No. I do believe the solution lies in loving each other, and loving God's good earth. "The greatest of these is love" is Paul's famous saying. "God so loved the world" indicates that we too must cherish the earth, which means going back to fundamentals. Our basic needs are food, shelter and clothing, the three essentials we need in addition to love. With all institutions in the process of failing, faith must continue to fashion our actions, faith that God looks after us when we "prepare the way of the Lord."

Bert Hielema worked all spring to prepare his 2000 sq. ft. veggie garden, this year also mixing in five years of accumulated compost. His blog can be found at ***hielema.ca/blog****.*

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Our posture

One of the foundational teachings of Living Waters Canada is acknowledging our need. Most of us grew up trying hard to stay in control, look good and avoid the whole notion of acknowledging our neediness. Some people may view this sort of vulnerability as a weakness rather than a strength.

I know that this was a mindset that I had for years. I tried really hard to posture myself so that people could see a strong person, capable, able to stand in the face of adversity, even if deep down I didn't know what the heck I was dealing with or how to cope.

This kept me bound in perfectionism with the inability to fully access the truth of my emotions and struggles. For some reason I was convinced that to be a good Christian I had to be free of struggles and free of temptations. I didn't grow up hearing people talk openly about what they were dealing with, and because I didn't hear about struggles I didn't hear a lot about the hope of how God meets people in their neediness. So you could imagine what it felt like to struggle with same sex attraction. I felt hopeless and alone.

When I took the Living Waters Program (it is a 25 week prayer and discipleship program addressing all relational and sexual issues), I heard the leaders share their vulnerabilities and what we would probably deem "weaknesses." Yet they shared in a way that caused me to see this as strength. They weren't afraid to voice where they were at and how God was meeting them in this place. At first I couldn't believe my ears. Were these "leaders" actually being honest? For me it was liberating to find a place where my posture wasn't in hiding, but rather in acknowledging how I was doing emotionally. In that place I could sit and invite God into those places, rather than isolate myself and be alone.

A place to live from

This has been the place where I have tried to continue to live out my life. Sometimes I still wrestle with the mindset of "what will people think if I share my struggle," but I see a greater gift of vulnerability and transparency when I share and a freedom that comes personally when I put myself in this place. There have been times when I have raised my fist at God in anger and despair, crying out in utter grief over the loss of babies through miscarriage. I didn't get it, but rather than stuffing my pain like I would have done years gone by, I acknowledged that my heart really, really hurt. I couldn't understand this loss but began to see Christ and his sovereignty in the midst of my pain. Realizing that all he was asking from me was my honesty, not a perfect response.

David postured himself in this way. Over and over again in the Psalms we read the record of his transparency about being real before the Lord. Almost half of the book of Psalms is comprised of Laments. David's posture toward the Lord is honest and raw, a place where we can find solace and example to do the same thing. I love Psalm 42 and verse 11 sums it up by saying, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. In Psalm 22 David cries out "God my God, why have you forsaken me?" and reading further, he proclaims that still in this place he praises God. David didn't get stuck in his posture of lament.

I don't think God's heart for us is to stay stuck in our lament. Rather, he wants us to posture ourselves knowing that we can be honest before him and with other safe people within our community. As we do this we find a freedom to know that no matter our emotional state – be that grief, disappointment, anger, joy or peace – we are acceptable to God, that he loves us regardless of what emotional posture we find ourselves in. All he's asking us for is our honesty to live fully present in this place, knowing that we don't need to have all the right answers or right responses. We can be downcast, disturbed and in this place put our hope in God who is Christ with us. We can scream out the similar cry "Why have you forsaken me?" and know that we are still accepted by a loving, faithful Father.

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Living Waters

CANADA

Living Waters offers a 25 week prayer and discipleship program addressing relational and sexual issues.

Reduce, reuse, repent: Earth Day revival amuses and transforms

Will Braun

WINNIPEG, Man. – The faithful and curious had gathered under a large red and white tent, 300 strong, for an old-fashioned revival meeting with a newfangled "consumption sabbath" twist (see www.consumptionsabbath.com).

The blue-robed gospel choir – which had warmed up for the event with a daring (and brief) flash mob performance inside a Walmart (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szxZuI837TM&feature=relmfu) – filed off the stage while "Brother Aiden John" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpQVUpC7Eok&feature=relmfu) settled in behind the microphone. His big plaid bow tie framed a slight smirk.

The Sunday morning crowd in our usually staid little prairie city was expectant. We had already heard the rousing testimony of a converted climate change avoider. We had sung spirited gospel numbers. And we had shouted our "Amen's," reluctantly at first, then with rising gusto.

The emotional stage was set. Our hearts were prepared – though for what, we were not quite sure.

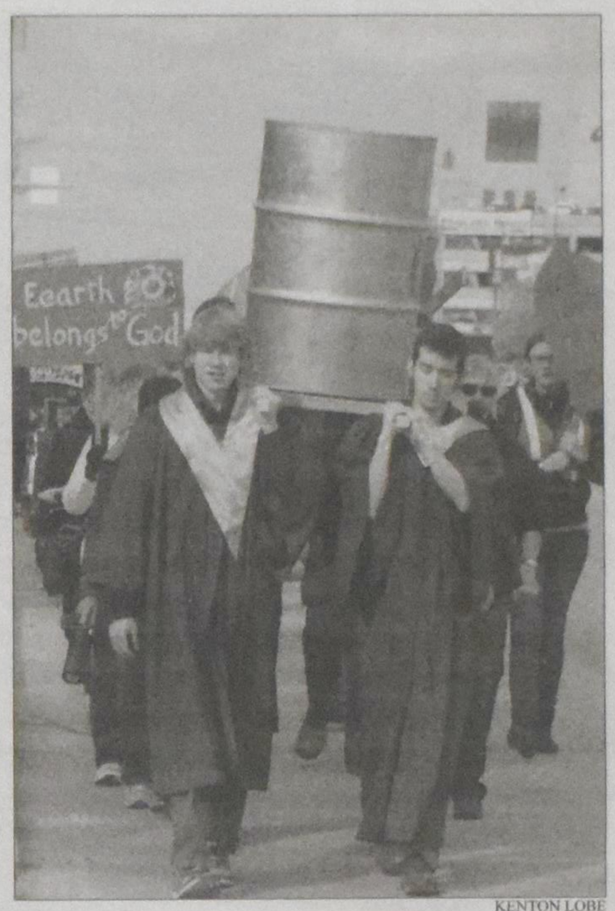
Some of us were familiar with the way traveling tent revival preachers of yesteryear would invite people to bring their sins to the altar and convert to Christianity at the emotionally orchestrated climax of their services, but none of us had been invited to lay our consumption burdens on the altar, or in this case, on the golden oil barrel next to the cross.

"I used to know the words of salvation," began Brother Aiden, a 50-year-old former youth pastor, seminarian and evangelical rocker. "But my journey has been one of disillusionment."

With the cadence and volume of an old-time evangelist, Aiden John continued his sermon: "There must be more to the gospel than a clean heart, material comforts and waiting for the earth to expire. What can be done to keep this earth from going the way of the landfill?"

KENTON LOBE

The event, which took place on Earth Day, April 22, was planned by an ad hoc group of Mennonite, Anglican and unaffiliated Christians in Winnipeg. As organizers, our wish was to combine performance art, sincere faith and concern for the earth. We chose the consumption sabbath theme to encapsulate the imbalanced relationship between humanity and the earth.



KENTON LOBE

A holy pause

"We buy too much stuff; we use too much energy," says fellow organizer Melanie Dennis Unrau. "We're literally consuming the earth; spewing our excess into the atmosphere. It's time for a holy pause, a different rhythm of life."

The event began with a procession that took participants down the city's main street, with a golden oil barrel in the lead, toward the tent site.

Our aim was not to parody the revival genre so much as to re-purpose it. So instead of toning down the religious stridence, as is the impulse of our age, Brother Aiden John revved it right up, but with a postmodern spin and plenty of self-referential humour.

During a rant about society's enchantment with electronic gadgetry, he poked fun at the fact that the service itself was being recorded and thus "lifted from its anchor in creation and somehow suspended in some kind of digital ether."

To which someone in the crowded yelled, "We are sinners brother!"

We all laughed. But the point about entanglement in a disconnected, screen-centered mode of living still registered. (Saints and sinners are invited to watch revival video clips at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoAz8GMpJfM&feature=relmfu).

Lighthearted use of the revival format didn't detract from the seriousness of the issues at hand; it made them more approachable. The format allowed Brother Aiden to use the word sin and unabashedly challenge people to give the earth a rest from its role of meeting our insatiable appetite for stuff. But it also allowed everyone to take a big step back from the chokingly earnest vibe that often encumbers faith-based social initiatives.

So when Brother Aiden continued his anti-digitization rant – "Lord save us from the ether!" – our smiles were mixed, in postmodern paradox, with a genuine sense of conviction.

The guilt that has so plagued religion, and that is sure to surface when topics like over-consumption and climate change arise, loses much of its grip when someone in an adopted revival character gives a fiery testimony about being lost in "consumptive sin" and then shouts, "If you've ever been lost, will you say 'Amen'?"

"Amen," we responded.

Postmodern Earth Day altar call

Fittingly, Brother Aiden, aka Aiden Enns, is a former managing editor with the anti-consumerist *Adbusters* magazine (www.adbusters.org) and the founding publisher of *Geez* (www.geezmagazine.org), a Winnipeg-based quarterly that promises "holy mischief in an age of fast faith."

He's also an admirer of Reverend Billy (www.revbilly.com) of New York's Church of Stop Shopping. The Reverend is a performance activist in televangelist character who, among other stunts, took to London's Tate Modern art gallery last summer to "exorcize" the "dark soul" of BP (www.revbilly.com/press/2011/07/reverend-billy-dramatizes-the-tate-modern-s-oily-mess) – one of the gallery's sponsors – from the building.

So what does a postmodern Earth Day altar call look like? With reference to the imminent use of music to complete the emotional crescendo of the revival formula, Brother Aiden John invited us to write our consumption sabbath pledges on the cards provided and then attach them to the oil barrel at the front.

As the choir sang and swayed, people of all ages streamed forward. They pledged to learn to live in smaller circles – to bike less and walk more, to eat locally, to plant gardens. Many pledged to take a digital Sabbath – "no screens on Sunday," one person wrote. Another pledged not to enter the doors of Walmart for a year.

The changes are incremental. The follow-through, as with any altar call, is not guaranteed. And the irony-laced performance element (not to mention the anti-consumer gist) is not for everyone. But for some, the playful mix of drama, spirit and consumption sabbath helped free up a new path forward.

So, my dear sisters and brothers out there in the ether, I invite you by the grace of our Lord to give your credit cards a holy pause, to let your conscience laugh and to give the earth a rest.

Do I hear an "Amen"?

Will Braun is a Winnipeg writer. This article first appeared in Huffington Post.

Rev. Dr. Wa Kitavi interview... *continued from p. 11*

having little with which to meet them.

While Africa is increasingly becoming the center of Christianity, the availability and affordability of Scripture is scarce. The demand for Bibles in Africa is immense. The supply has never been adequate and yet it is the key to faith, sharing faith and to church growth. This lack of Scripture is a famine that no one talks about. How can these believers mature in their faith without a Bible? This is one of the major challenges as well as the motivation that drives CRWM work in Eastern and Southern Africa. Additionally, close to 70 percent of church leaders have little or no training. Our struggle is how to train them.

The rewards are great, too, like seeing churches being planted among the Masaais of Kenya and Karamojongs of Uganda. Church leaders appreciate what we do with them, equipping them to lead effectively. It's encouraging seeing people open to receive the gospel and coming to Christ.

What would you like Canadians to know and understand about Uganda?

Uganda is still the pearl of Africa, open to the gospel, but it struggles politically and economically. It is neither a Christian nor a Muslim nation. The African Traditional Religion is still a force to be reckoned with. Former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi invested heavily in Uganda, so the influence of Islam has grown. On the main highways, there is a mosque every 10 kilometres. There is a large Islamic university near the PTC, and scholarships to study *sharia law* are available to almost everyone. Islamic medical clinics have been established and also elementary and secondary schools. There is even an Islamic mall!

So these are challenges. But Muslims in Uganda are not militant. There has been no conflict like in Nigeria and Christians aren't afraid. The growth of the church is enormous. I pray that these things don't change.

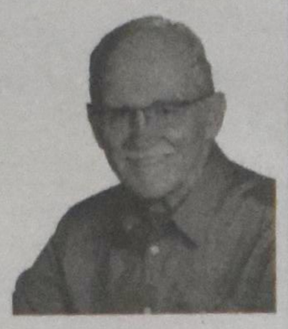
Are there ways in which we can support *Farming in Faith*?

First, pray with us, second, come and visit and see what the Lord is doing. Finally, give a cow. And to God be the glory.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. *She lives in Wyoming, Ont.*

Advertising

Ben Vandezande Retires from Christian Reformed Home Missions



Recently, Ben Vandezande has announced that he will be concluding his work as Director of Ministry Teams for Christian Reformed Home Mis-sions as of June 30, 2012. That is only a smaller part of a longer story of faithful kingdom service.

Ben has not only served with Home Missions for 11 years in various capacities, including Eastern Canada Regional Leader, Interim Director, and Director of Ministry Teams but before that also worked with Diaconal Ministries Canada as their director, and more locally in the St. Catharines area as a city alderman, a community developer and advocate, and as a high school teacher.

In the words of Adrian Van Giessen, who followed Ben as Home Mission's regional leader for Eastern Canada: "For over 25 years, Ben has been a mentor, coach and friend to many of us. For Ben it never seemed to matter if you were an awkward teenager, a deacon starting your first term, or a pastor struggling to find your leadership legs. Ben would listen and then say something insightful, challenging and wise that would linger long after the conversation was over. For me and many others, Ben has truly been one of God's special gifts to the CRC in Canada!"

In retirement, Ben looks forward to enjoying a change of pace while living in Burlington, Ontario. He plans to do some part-time work coaching pastors, leaders, and churches who want to discern what it means to be part of the mission of God. He is thankful to God for His faithfulness and grace, and for the many colleagues and friends with whom he could share his journey.

Please feel free to email best wishes to Ben at **bvandezande@crcna.org** .

Blessings,
~The Christian Reformed Home Missions in Eastern Canada~

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Birthday

70th Birthday

Peter Tensen

wishes to thank the Lord for fulfilling Psalm 90:10 for a three score and ten year life span in his life.

Born June 25th, 1942, in Andijk. My father, Jacob, died June 1st, 1985, exactly four weeks before his 68th birthday. He was a better man and a lot less selfish Christian than myself.

Who has ever figured out the Almighty. Job tried.

Address: 92 Elliott Rd
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Obituary

Okke Ellens
1920 – 2012

Sing to the Lord a New Song Psalm 96:1

Okke Ellens, with a song in his heart, went home to forever sing praises to his Lord on Monday, May 28, 2012 in his 93rd year.

Loved brother of the late Peter Ellens (2011), the late Ken Ellens (2007), Alice Van der Wal, Jessie Terpstra and brother-in-law Clarence Terpstra. Beloved uncle of many nephews and nieces who benefited from his kind deeds, encouragement and interest in their lives.

Okke was a long-time faithful member of Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church in Niagara Falls. He used his rich tenor voice to praise God and bless others. He resided and farmed in Niagara-on-the-Lake for many years.
We, his family, are thankful for the life he shared with us.

A Service of Remembrance was held at Rehoboth CRC on Tuesday, June 5, 2012.

Correspondence may be sent to:
Jake Ellens
305 German School Rd.
Paris ON N3L 3E1

Obituary

Gerrie VanderPerk (nee VanEgmond)

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matt.28:20

Gerrie VanderPerk passed away peacefully, surrounded by her family at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Hospital on June 2, 2012, in her 86th year.

Beloved wife of Gys, she will be sadly missed.

Loving mother to:
Bert (Rose) VanderPerk
John (Liz) VanderPerk
Pete (Margaret) VanderPerk
Lydia (Bill) Postma
Nelly (Fred) Lof

Cherished Oma of 16 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Gerrie was a long time faithful member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church where she gave of herself in many ways by serving others through the nursery at Coffee Break and through Friendship Club, which was very dear to her. As well, she spent countless hours crocheting for the Warehouse of Hope.

The funeral was held at Covenant Christian Reformed Church on Wednesday, June 6, 2012.

Those who wish to send condolences to the family may do so at:
G. VanderPerk,
2 Garrison Village Drive
Niagara on the Lake ON L0S 1J0
or g.vanderperk@yahoo.ca

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See p. 19 for another job opportunity ad.

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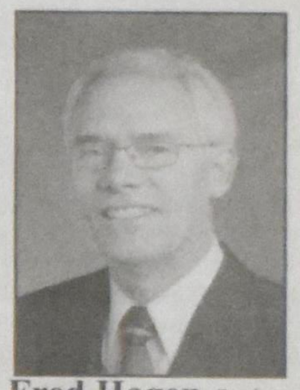

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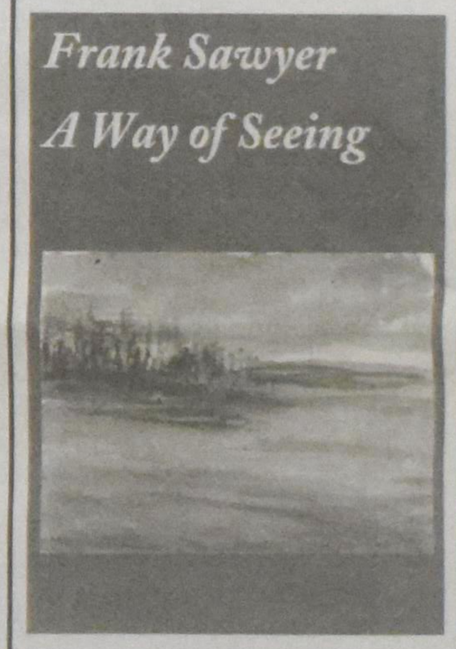

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 24 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching. DVDs are available.

July 2 Frisian picnic starting 11 a.m. at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, Paris, Ont. on Highway 24A. Contact: tjbergy@hotmail.com.

Sep 18 " Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Musica Sacra Chorus". **Ancaster**, Redeemer College Auditorium at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep19 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Grimsby**, Mountainview Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm. See hollandchristianmalechoir.com

Sep 21 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Brampton**, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sept 21 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. **Georgetown** Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm.

Sep 22 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. Durham Christian Homes, **Whitby** at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 24 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp. First Christian Reformed Church, **Kingston**, at 8 pm. See: www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 26 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp and "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director. Calvin Christian Reformed Church, **Ottawa** at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 27 "Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director. Cephas Christian Reformed Church, **Peterborough** at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

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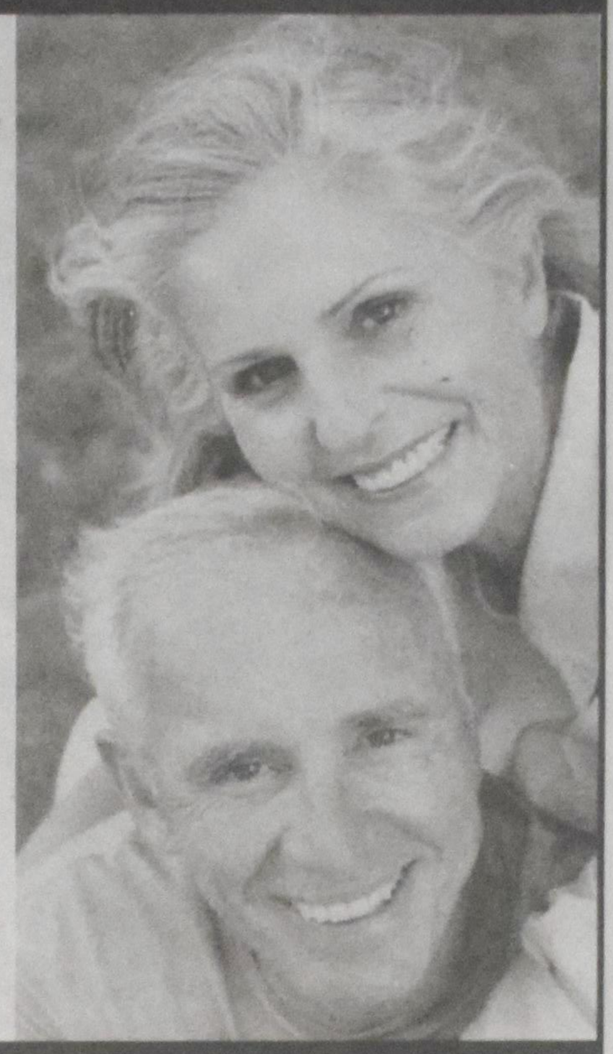

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And do not understand
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That they can make us wise
To the road to paradise.

I Lament
When I cannot comprehend
Have no clue, what is true?
From what I hear or read
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I Lament
Encouraged to buy and spend
Articles: supposed to be God sent
Gives me unease, instead of peace.

No more lament
Since God will make me content
He knows my needs better than I
So carry on, no need to cry
Thank you my Lord for being there
I speak to you; I know you care.

Poem from book *Out of My Mind*
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Christian Courier is seeking applications for the part-time position of Layout design. Knowledge of web design an asset.

The job is two-fold: to layout roughly 15 pages on a bi-weekly basis (between five and 10 hours per week) and to maintain the paper's website. There is some flexibility regarding start dates and responsibilities, which can be adjusted to a qualified applicant's abilities.

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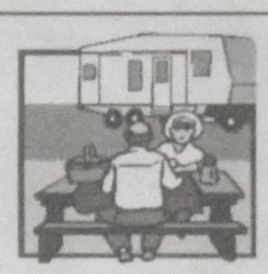

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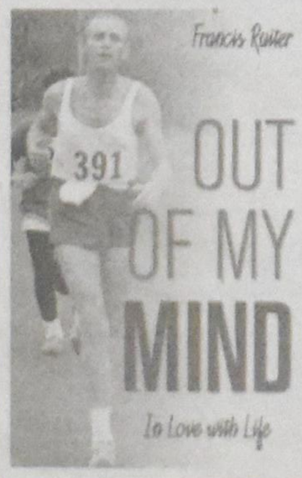
Francis Ruiter, author of *"Journal of a Dutch Immigrant"* introduces his second book,



Out of my Mind: In love with Life

Francis continues to recount stories of his past. He reflects on life's hopes and fears, sorrow and joys. In his final entry, "Facing Darkness," the author relates his confrontation with, and emotional triumph over, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.
This book also includes some interesting "Poetry".
Francis' books are available in Christian Book stores and in Chapters and Indigo stores or it can be ordered on-line at **Amazon.ca**.

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God in a special way

Jim Poelman

The United Reformed Church of South Africa challenges a common conception of God when it says "God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" (Belhar Confession). Does this confession have Biblical leverage? Does the Bible reveal God as being "in some SPECIAL WAY" the God "of the destitute, the poor and the wronged?"

It seems to fly in the face of Scripture to conclude that God gives special preference for those who are "destitute, poor, and wronged" over those who are comfortable, rich and empowered. The gospel summary text spoken by Jesus in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" is all inclusive in its scope. God is God of everyone regardless of our social or economic status. Further, the Good News that propelled the early church in Jerusalem to move into Gentile territory (and still moves the church today) was the conviction that "God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34)." In his letter to the Galatian churches, the Apostle Paul emphatically spoke of God in Christ being the great human leveler when he said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ (3:28)."

Jesus taught that "whatever is done for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Can the statement that "God … in a special way is the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" be made on Biblical grounds? Is the Belhar Confession flawed with ambiguity and error at this very foundational level in its perception of the equal place everyone has before God?

I believe Jesus addressed the same "God, in a world full of injustice and enmity" issue raised in the Belhar Confession. In his concluding teaching sermon, recorded in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus pictured people who were hungry, thirsty, alone, too poor to purchase clothing, sick, and confined to a forgotten life in prison. Jesus identified these conditions as being places where justice, mercy and care call for attention. It is a world which will, as Jesus' sermon indicates, be "full of injustice and enmity" if these people are neglected.

God's stance on injustice

What picture of God does Jesus provide in his concluding sermon? If Jesus is the great revealer of the "grace and truth" of God (John 1:18), then this concluding parable speaks powerfully of where God stands in "a world of injustice and enmity." Jesus announced that "in a special way" he is with "the destitute, the poor and the wronged." In what way does he do this? Jesus pictures himself identifying with those who are hungry, thirsty, lonely, suffering for lack of adequate clothing, sick, and forgotten in prison. He identifies with these people in these conditions to the extent that "whatever is done (or not done) for one of the least of these brothers (and sisters) of mine, you did (or did not do) for me."

Jesus' line of reasoning here is shockingly simple. He takes what we do or what we do not do so seriously that this becomes the way the King separates all the people, "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats," and so decides their destiny. This last layer of accountability gives indelible credibility to the truth that God in a special way is the God of those for whom justice calls for acts of mercy and a life driven by attention as though caring directly for Jesus.

This God "in a world of injustice" who identifies with those whose conditions cry for justice does not show up for the first time in Jesus' concluding sermon. Rather, this is who God has always been and what God has always done. God was there in a "special way" for Israel when it was subjected to slavery in Egypt. God was with David in a special way when he was threatened and chased by King Saul. God was with Naboth in a special way when King Ahab used his kingly powers to take Naboth's vineyard from him. God was with the parents and their children in a special way when the disciples rebuked them and tried to send them away from Jesus. God was with the tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners in a special way when the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law judged them as unfit for the temple and far from God. Jesus dined with them repeatedly! The God revealed in the Bible has always been the Lord God who, "in a world of injustice" has been "in a special way, the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged."

No doubt that is precisely why Jesus, says what he does in his concluding sermon. Whatever we did for the least of these, we did for him. God wants, God commands, God holds us accountable to be as "specially" there to bring justice and love in real and tangible ways as he, in a world of injustice, is there already ahead of us.

Thank you friends in the South Africa United Reformed Church for challenging us and encouraging us to be more like Jesus. The injustices identified by Jesus and addressed in your Belhar Confession are not limited to Apartheid or to South Africa. They *are* found throughout the entire world. We will never run out of places where we will find Jesus in the faces of the least among us longing to be heard, cared for and loved.

Pastor Jim Poelman has been reading the Bible and mining its treasures for a number of years. He is thankful to be part of a congregation (Redeemer CRC, Sarnia, Ont.) that seeks to "Mirror Christ and Embrace All."

Odds and Trends

In honour of the UEFA Euro 2012 tournament (which concludes on July 1), this edition of Odds and Trends offers some strange but true stories from the world of soccer. The following stories are drawn from Donn Risolo's *Soccer Stories: Anecdotes, Oddities, Lore, and Amazing Feats*.

Paid in cattle?

Having run out of cash during the 1996 season, the Brazilian second division club Londrina actually resorted to paying its players in cattle. Seventy head of cattle were divided among the players based on their performance, and the move helped the club cut its debts from $5 million to $2 million.

Named for the game

In 1976 two Manchester United superfans named their newborn son after the members of that year's team. Graham Alex Jimmy Stewart Gerry Brian Martin Steve Sammy Stuart Lou Gordon David Tommy Matt Cross grew up to be a pretty good soccer player himself, and at the age of 15 was actually offered a contract by Manchester United – which he turned down in order to sign with Leeds.

Playing at the Pole

In 1995 eight men's amateur teams from Russia staged the world's first ever soccer tournament at the North Pole, making soccer the first organized team sport to be played on top of the world. The winner of the tournament was, rather fittingly, a team of employees from a refrigerator plant.

Outlandish own goals

In a 2002 match the Stade Olympique de l'Emyrne club from Madagascar found a particularly self-destructive way to express its displeasure with the referee's performance: kicking the ball into their own net 149 times throughout the course of the match.

Who am I?

When coach John Lambie of Scotland's Partick Thistle club was told that striker Colin McGlashan had suffered a concussion and didn't know who he was during a 1993 match, Lambie apparently replied: "That's great. Tell him he's Pelé and get him back on."

No contract? Join church team

Brazillian goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel should have been in high demand after playing a key role in Brazil's 1994 World Cup win. But because of international player quotas in the Italian league where he was playing, Taffarel found himself unemployed for seven months following the World Cup finals. Taffarel ended up playing for his church team to pass the time, where he switched to centre forward and scored 15 goals in seven games.

Ajax can grow players but not turf

Ajax Amsterdam is renowned for its youth development system, but apparently cannot grow grass. After the club moved into a new stadium in 1996, the playing surface had to be replaced 24 times in the first five years. Ajax fans became so frustrated and embarrassed by the situation that in January 2001 a group of them released two cows on the field. One of the cows made a much-needed contribution of manure before being led away by stadium personnel.

Theological lesson

Before becoming the darling of English soccer, David Beckham was reviled in England after a retaliatory kick to an opponent earned him a red card during a 1998 World Cup match against Argentina (which England lost). The newspaper headlines were merciless: "What an Idiot!" "Dozy David Has Ruined Our Lives" "You Let the Nation Down." A Baptist church in Nottingham wasn't much kinder in its reaction, but took the opportunity to convey a theological message on their church sign: "God forgives even David Beckham."